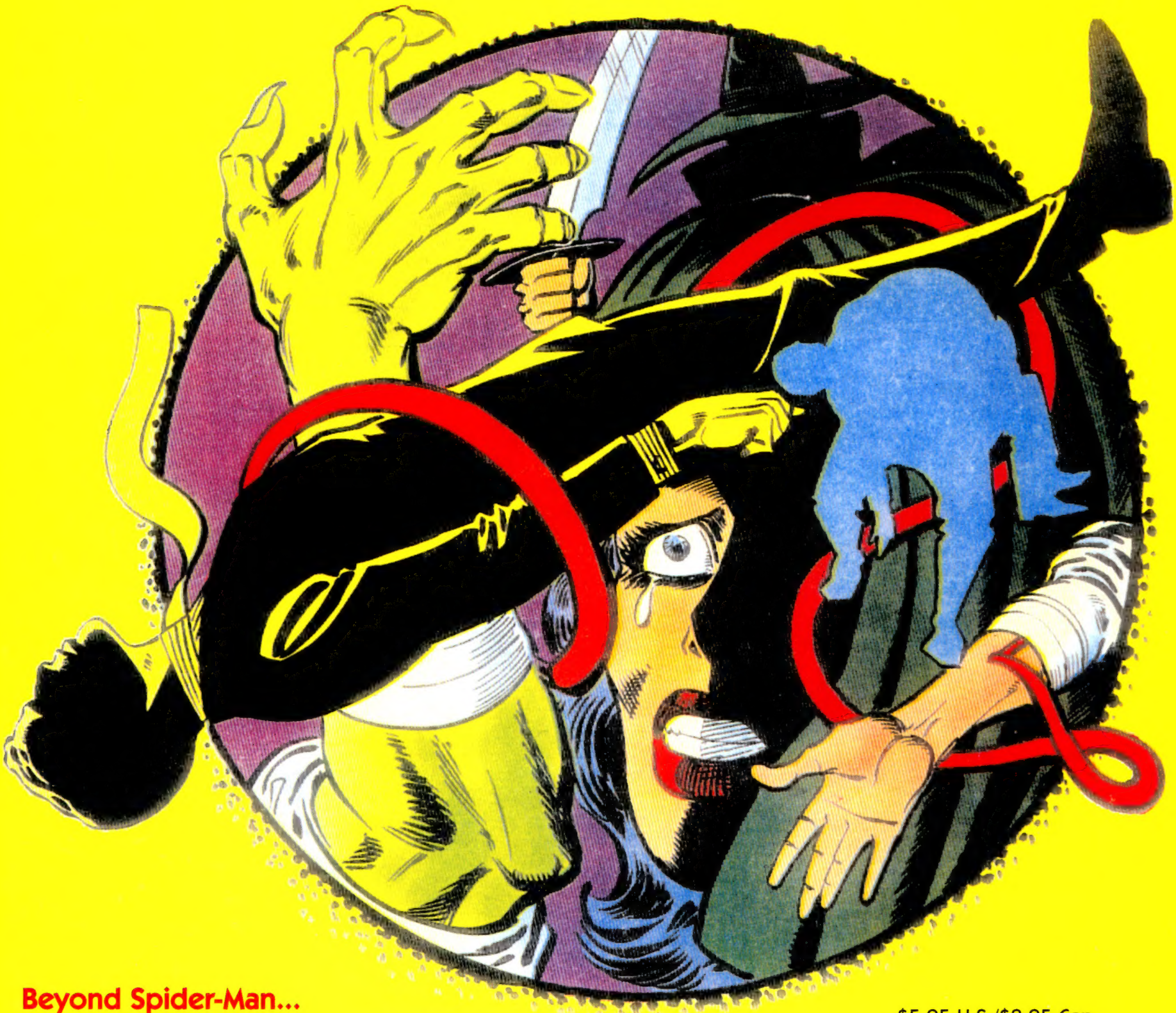
The Magazine for Serious Collectors is Back!

COMIC BOOK MARKETPLACE

No. 84
Aug. 2001



Beyond Spider-Man...

Bronze Age DITKO!

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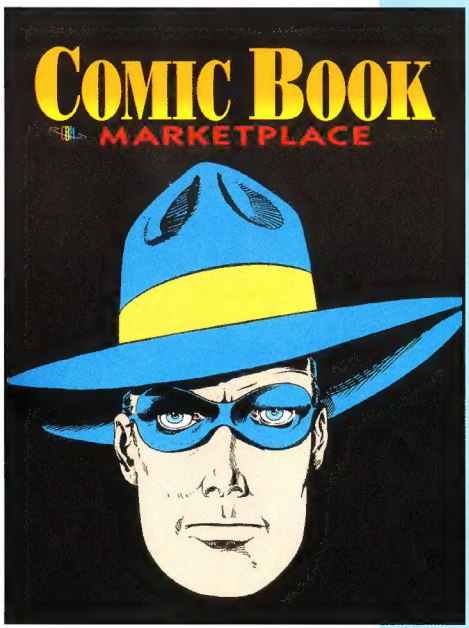
GEMSTONE PUBLISHING

COMIC BOOK MARKETPLACE #85

NEXT ISSUE!

Cover B – Spirit/Dave Gibbons



Cover A – Spirit/Will Eisner

Comic Book Marketplace, the magazine for serious collectors, gets into the spirit of things with a look at one of the most influential creations in comics history from one of the most vital creators the medium has ever seen, ***The Spirit*** by **Will Eisner**! A whole new generation of fans is discovering The Spirit and Eisner's other work through DC's new line of ***Spirit Archives*** and graphic novels. In ***CBM #85***, we talk to the grandmaster, Will Eisner himself, about his reactions to the current Spirit revival, and we also talk to Denis Kitchen and DC *Archives* editor Dale Crain about what goes into putting together these comprehensive volumes. *CBM* also shines the spotlight on other Spirit collectibles, too. Also: Golden Age great **Marty Nodell** (*Green Lantern*) opens up about his influences! Take a look at the latest market reports, and much, much more! *Comic Book Marketplace* is back – now edited by Russ Cochran!

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

The returning features you love...

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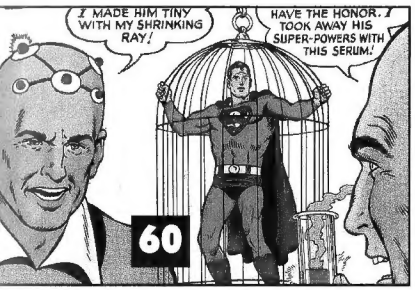

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ABOUT THE COVERS:

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A funny thing happened on the way to the pasture...

Bill Gaines and Russ Cochran, 1978, as seen by Chuck Fiala

Just one year ago, in *CBM* #80, the tribute-to-EC issue celebrating the golden anniversary of the New Trend comics, editor Gary Carter summed up his recollections of his days spent reading *MAD* and his admiration for William M. Gaines, EC's (and *MAD*'s) beloved publisher. When I first saw that issue, at the San Diego Comic Con last July, I complimented Gary on what was my favorite issue of *CBM* (so far!), and as I devoured all the fine articles therein, little did I suspect what the fates had in store for me!

I am just as surprised as you to be writing this editorial as the new editor of *CBM*! It was mostly a matter of timing...(you'll notice I use the three dots...called ellipsis...a lot in my writing, something I learned from reading Al Feldstein's EC stories)...as the year 2000 ended, Gemstone's long-running reprinting of the EC comics also came to the end of the road...we had reprinted ALL of the New Trend and New Direction comic books and had completed the best of the Pre-Trend comics...in fact, we have reprinted it all with the exception of some of the pre-Bill Gaines titles which collectors have shown little interest in (and rightly so).

The contract I had signed with Steve Geppi in 1993 when I sold him my publishing operation (together with my personal art collection) had expired, and with the EC project finished, I was expecting to be turned out to pasture when...surprise!...John Snyder called me with the sad news that Gary and Lisa Carter had resigned, and asked if I would be interested. And with my 64th birthday coming up, feeling that I still have some contributions to make to our hobby, not quite ready to retire, I agreed to give it a shot.

You will find that this issue of *CBM* is very similar to past issues...the same interesting columns by the same group of writers, Mike Naiman's up-to-the-minute Market Reports, and articles about Spider-Man and other comic book folks. Most of this issue had been written (but not edited or laid out) when the editorial reins were passed to me, and I have tried to keep the magazine looking pretty much like the 83 issues produced by Gary, but as time goes on, I want to make some changes. While *CBM* will continue to be about comic books, collecting them, and buying and selling them, I want to bring some of my own interests to the table. I will be running more articles in the future about collecting original art, a special interest of mine, and about the comics we all read BEFORE we read comic books...the comics in the daily and Sunday newspapers. With *CBM* standing here at a fork in the road, I solicit your input regarding what kinds of articles you would like to see featured in future issues. I invite you to write me or e mail me with suggestions for new articles. If I start to stray too far away from the traditional *CBM* content, I want you to tell me. Gary and Lisa did such a great job with this magazine, and what I want to do is to keep all the loyal readers and subscribers whom they have pleased in the past, and to add new collectors who collect original art, newspaper strips, etc. I'm looking forward to hearing from you!

And if I don't see you in the future, I'll see you in the pasture!

Russ

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FOUR-COLOR CORNU-COPIAS!

By Pat Calhoun

The short-story anthologies that were prevelant during the early 1950s—by sales amounts and most other factors the peak era for comics—provided many pleasures. Most pleasing were the occasional issues that gathered together a handful of stellar artists. For the connoisseur these represent the finest possible packagings of illustrated literature. Here, we will examine three such books from the fantasy genre, a genre that surged ahead of all others and produced the most memorable material during those bountiful years.

Science fiction comics were just getting started in 1950, and Ziff-Davis decided to hire Jerry Siegel—co-creator of the world's most famous SF character—as executive editor to begin their own sci-fi entry. *Amazing Adventures* #1 (November 1950) was auspicious in many ways, especially as a showcase for a slew of top-notch artists. If only the writing had been a little stronger (ah, Jerry) Z-D might still be publishing comics, and *Amazing Adventures* would be coming up on its 500th ish.

Even so, it's fun. Robert Gibson Jones was busy painting fabulous covers for Z-D's two sci-fi pulps: *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic Adventures* (which both lent a word to the comic's title), and it made good sense to have him on the front of their maiden four-color SF effort. It's a beautiful rendition of "The Asteroid Witch." Inside, the art on the lead tale is provided by the able Murphy Anderson, working from an only slightly silly Siegel script that still manifests some erotic energy as the siren of the spaceways meets her female match.

Next, "A-Day" is an atomic war warning drawn by Ogden Whitney. It's not much of a yarn, but the blond lady lead is a ringer for Odgen's "Undercover Girl" that he drew for ME and hence inspires a few fond recollections.

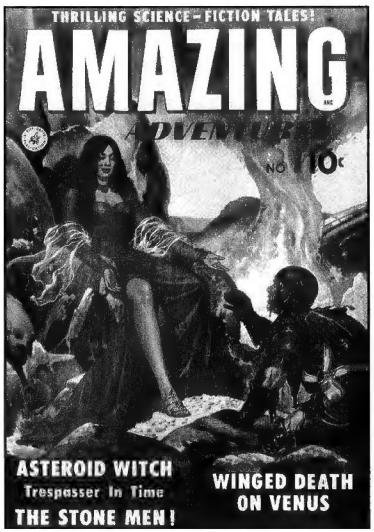
"Winged Death on Venus" offers graphics by one of the kings of comic book SF, Wally Wood. It's solid grade-B space opera, entertaining and visually elegant hokum. "Trespasser in Time" is the most interesting story, with art by a sci-fi master who didn't do enough interiors, Alex Schomburg. It juggles dimensional travel, monsters whose touch brings death by old age, and aliens who morph into luscious women, with some deftness if not to any great point. And Schomburg's images are full of the "sense of wonder"—1950s style.

There's a final, somewhat familiar, alien invasion yarn, and a Whitney back cover of "Amazing Prophecies," truly a jam-packed first issue.

Men's Adventures #23 (September 1953) combines an equally awesome art line-up with superior storytelling, resulting in an exemplary fantasy comic. The Bill Everett "melting man" cover is a charming 5-panel strip in itself. The first story is drawn by Howie Post, who's known chiefly as a humor artist, but he did do a fair amount of Atlas fantasy, often with worthwhile results. This tale of a brutal white plantation owner facing army ants in Africa is one of his best. "The Bones" is rendered by Mort Lawrence, who may not be a big name but is a fine stylist, and he outdoes himself in this little vampire yarn.

"The Drowning Witch" is a good sea story, with art by the master of matters oceanic, Reed Crandall. Atlas made wise use of the wonderful artists who were footloose after the demise of EC. An evil hag is thrown overboard off an old-time passenger ship after too many complaints of her black magic, but she leaves a deadly curse behind.

"The Wrong Body" is a superb "biter-bitten" weirdie as a dimwitted mob muscleboy freaks out upon being assigned his first kill. The high-tech poetic justice is delicious, and the art by Myron Fass is nicely-realized fifties moderne.



Robert Gibson Jones had been painting covers for Ziff-Davis' sci-fi pulps for years, specializing in super-women, and he produced a classic for their first SF comic, Amazing Adventures #1 (Nov 1950)

Men's Adventures #23 (Sep 1953) Bill Everett's "going, going, gone" cover begins one of the all-time great fantasy issues. This former war title featured weird tales from #21-#26 before starting a short revival of Golden Age superheroes in #27

Wrapping things up is "The Thief," an all-time classic tale of one of the "coins of Judas," the pay Iscariot received for betraying Christ. These coins bring their owners quick fortune followed by an even faster downfall. There's a truly spectacular twist ending, and combined with Matt Fox's incredibly intense inking the excellent story becomes a four-color triumph.

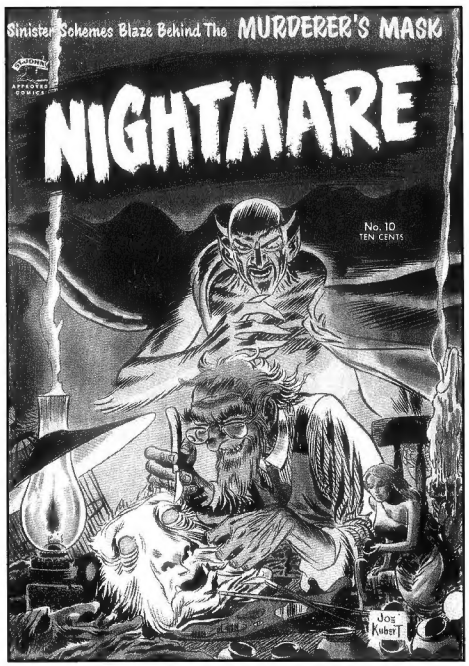
What a fabulous book! Atlas was doing so well with fantasy at the time, offering a dozen titles, that they converted this former war mag for a few issues of spooky stuff.

Nightmare #10 (December 1953) is actually a reprint of Z-D's *Weird Thrillers* #2 (November/December 1952), but in repackaging it St. John added a fantastic Joe Kubert cover and two handsome filler pages by Everett Raymond Kinstler to make the ish even more of an art extravaganza. "The Fisherman of Space" is well conceived and written, illustrated by the remarkable Alex Toth. An immortal alien who has been kidnapping people for thousands of years makes the mistake of snatching a physicist and a Scotland Yard investigator, and the two team up to defeat him with modern science. "The Last Man" is a better-than-average yarn about a cosmic gas cloud that wipes out most life on Earth, with appealing visuals by the almost-unknown Henry Sharp (identified by Jim Vadeboncoeur).

"The Cycle of Time" is a real winner, a perfect time travel paradox tale with bravura drawing by Murphy Anderson. A crook on the lam bumps into two aliens in their time-space globe, and they take him back to dinosaur days and win a narrow escape from a tyrannosaurus. When the aliens announce their intention of going back to the present and making the machine a gift to humanity they sign their death warrant. But the murderer comes to learn that time sets traps for the unwary.

"Murderer's Mask" is a story that's been through countless incarnations: a man with evil intent buys a mask from a strange little shop, hoping to disguise himself for murder. But when the deed is done and the mask removed, the face beneath is not the face he had before. Gene Colan puts a fresh "face" on the well-used but still workable plot.

These books are special because the presence of so many talented illustrators helps insure that the formula for four-color success gets fulfilled: good stories with good art.



Nightmare #10 (Dec 1953) This "devil made him do it" gem by Joe Kubert may be his finest fantasy cover, and a bonus that St. John added to this reprint of Ziff-Davis' Weird Thrillers #2

Funk in the Fifties

How Ajax and Superior Romance Comics Were an Anomaly

By Michelle Nolan

For the best in "Fifties Funk," check out Ajax romance comics.

For the period, comics don't get any funkier, with weird story titles, odd covers and mediocre but often experimental art styles.

Not many folks collect Ajax comics—otherwise known as Farrell Comics—in part because they are an acquired taste with bizarre, usually sub-par Iger Shop art and in part because they are among the most obscure comics published in the 1954-58 period.

In the past, I've written about the brief Ajax super-hero revival of 1954-55 and have touched on various Ajax titles, along with the history of publisher Robert Farrell. But the little-known company's efforts at romance titles reached a new high (or low) in unadulterated funkiness.

I recall having these thoughts when I saw Ajax comics on the stands as a mere grade-school student. As I remember, my first thought was "What is a detergent company doing publishing comic books?" In retrospect, that's appropriate, considering the Ajax romance titles were just about the ultimate in comic book soap opera.

I also remember wondering why Ajax's logo in the top left-hand corner looked almost exactly like the Dell logo. In fact, Ajax even used a smaller logo in its earlier years, similar to Dell's smaller logo without the square with dots, until shifting to Dell-style dots in 1956, a few months after Dell. A coincidence?

Ajax occasionally published comics under other imprints, such as Steinway and America's Best in 1957-58, in an extremely convoluted publishing history. But the first real Ajax comic is generally considered to be the masked western hero title *Lone Rider* #1 in April, 1951, obviously started to take advantage of the popularity of the Lone Ranger.

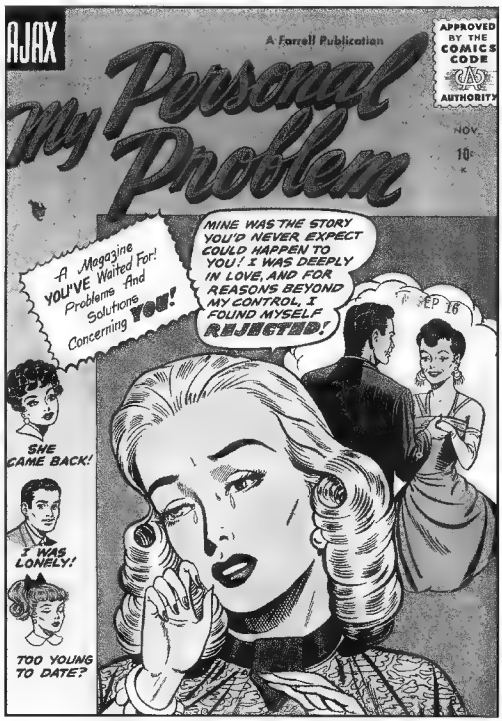
Ajax publisher Robert Farrell, whose first attempts at comics included the 11-issue run of *Captain Flight* in the mid-1940s, is probably best-known for publishing the flamboyant horror title *Voodoo* for 19 issues in 1952-54 along with its sister title *Strange Fantasy*. In one of the odder title evolutions caused by the Comics Code Authority, *Voodoo* became the jungle girl reprint title *Vooda* for #20-22.

Farrell, however, actually published more romance comics than any other genre. More than one-fifth of the 320 Ajax comics (it's still not certain whether a couple exist) were romance issues—70 in all.

It took Southern California indexer Dan Stevenson and me fully 15 years to track down all the Ajax romance comics and verify their existence. We finished this task when Dan finally found one of the rarest of all 1950s comics—*All True Romance* #30 (July 1957)—in the past year. I noticed this issue listed in an early *Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide*, yet neither Dan nor I had been able to find one in 15 years of active searching!

You're likely to uncover a few Ajax comics at any major convention, but collecting all 70 is one of the great challenges of the 1950's field. I've managed to find 52 of them and Dan has the ones I don't have.

Ajax's romance line began with *Bride's Secrets* #1, which is dated March/April, 1954, on the cover and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MINE WAS THE STORY YOU'D NEVER EXPECT COULD HAPPEN TO YOU! I WAS DEEPLY IN LOVE, AND FOR REASONS BEYOND MY CONTROL, I FOUND MYSELF REJECTED!
SHE CAME BACK!
I WAS LONELY!
TOO YOUNG TO DATE?

My Personal Problem #1 (Nov 1955). One of the great 'cult' romance titles, with typical Ajax tears

April/May inside. That was typical of Ajax's sometimes-bizarre bookkeeping. By the way, that was exactly how the title was punctuated—"Bride's," as in one bride. If we were to take this at grammatical face value, the entire 19-issue run should have been about one particular bride, which would have been a lot of secrets, indeed.

This title lasted throughout the history of Ajax romance titles, yet ran only 19 issues because only two issues were published in 1956.

Ajax got serious about love when it purchased two romance titles, *All True Romance* and *Lonely Heart*, when previous publisher Comic Media folded at the end of 1954 (other Comic Media titles were picked up by Charlton Comics, the leading scavenger in the field at the time).

The only other Comic Media title Ajax picked up was *Terrific Comics*, which was entitled *Horrific Comics* for its first 13 issues before becoming *Terrific* with #14 (December 1954). There was no *Terrific* #15 from either publisher; Ajax took over with #16, featuring the revival of the 1940's character Wonder Boy, before the comic became retitled *Wonder Boy* for its last two issues (#17 and 18).

Lonely Heart picked up under Ajax with #9 (Mar 1955) following its eight-issue Comic Media run. However, *All True Romance* skipped from #20 (December 1954) under Comic Media to #22 (March 1955) under Ajax, with entirely new art and a totally different logo, shifting from Comic Media's ugly outlined capital letters to Ajax's script. That was actually unusual at the time; when other companies, such as Charlton and DC, scarfed up titles they usually retained the old logos for a while.

There was no *All True Romance* #21 from either Comic Media or Ajax, possibly because the original publisher of the title, Artful Publications, published two #7 issues—one with a date of September, 1952, in the indicia and November on the cover and another dated November throughout.

What's interesting about *All True Romance* #22 is that it has a Farrell statement of ownership dated September 28, 1954—when, in theory, Comic Media's *All True Romance* #20 still should have been on the newsstands. Likewise, *Lonely Heart* #9 has a Farrell ownership statement dated October 1, 1954. I've never seen such an ownership statement situation. And, as far as I know, Comic Media was an entirely separate company from Ajax/Farrell.

Ajax began publishing a fourth romance title with *Bride's Diary* #4 (May 1955), which the indicia reveals continues from the only three issues of *The Flame*. Then came a mini-boom—at the end of 1955 Ajax began four new romance titles. They were *My Personal Problem* and *Today's Brides* (#1 for both is November 1955) and *Secret Love* and *True Life Romances* (#1 for both is December 1955).

However, like Charlton during 1956—a tempestuous but generally productive year for comics, with slightly more than 2,000 corporately produced comics issued—Ajax published its eight romance titles sporadically, with a maximum of three issues in 1956 for any of the eight and a total of only 21 issues.

Even so, other than a single issue of the little girl humor title *Sweetie Pie* (#2, May 1956), all of Ajax's 1956 titles were romance comics. Gone were the super-hero, jungle girl, horror and western issues of 1955. Ajax, though, didn't give love much of a chance—the company published only 12 romance comics in 1957 and just eight in 1958, out of nearly 100 issues published in those final two years of Ajax.

However, in its last gasp during mid-1958, Ajax tried to corner the market on *Casper the*

AJAX
MAY
INTIMATE LOVE STORIES
All True Romance
A Farrell Publication
DOESN'T ANYBODY CARE ABOUT THE TRUTH? WON'T SOMEONE LISTEN TO MY STORY OF WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE... I WAS "THAT WOMAN"!
In this issue THIS IS GOODBYE!
ROBERTA BENNETT'S LOVELORN GUIDE

All True Romance #23 (May 1955), a 'cruel-face' cover, surprisingly harsh for a Code-approved comic

Friendly Ghost knockoffs, coming up with *Mighty Ghost* #4 (formerly *Mighty Bear*) plus the cult favorites *Superspook* #4 (formerly *Frisky Animals on Parade*) and *Spunky the Smiling Spook* #1-4. You might say that romance didn't have a ghost of a chance with this company.

All in all, Ajax was a truly strange trip, ranging from a variety of titles in 1952-55 to almost exclusively romance in 1956 and back primarily to non-romance titles in 1957-58.

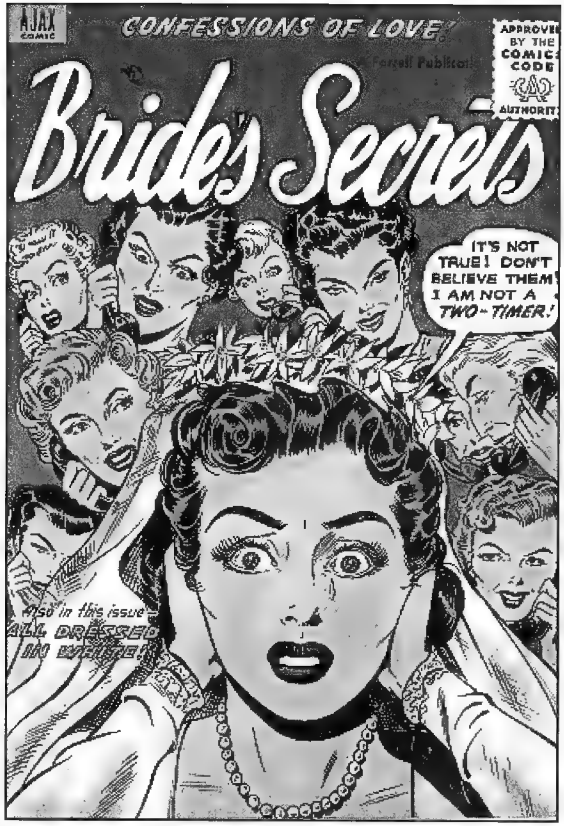
Ajax romance covers were notorious for close-ups of faces, often with the tears so typical of post-Code love comics from several companies. (In many pre-Code issues, the women were too busy defending their honor or dominating the scene to be shedding tears.)

Most of the Ajax covers involved a high degree of emotional distress. They almost never portrayed happiness and at least two of them featured backgrounds of sneering faces unlike anything I've ever seen in post-Code romance comics.

Bride's Secrets #8 (Jun 1955) features a teary-eyed bride on the cover exclaiming, "It's not true! Don't believe them! I am not a two-timer!" with nine women's faces in the background supposedly gossiping on phones. A couple of the faces are truly malevolent—surprisingly so for a Code-approved comic. It's interesting to note that there are no men's faces!

The other "cruel face" cover features eight people of both sexes laughing at a teary-eyed blonde in *All True Romance* #23 (May 1955). Once again, it's odd for an early Code-approved cover. Ajax apparently never tried doing covers like this again, possibly because of Code objections. I can't believe the Code would have approved either of these covers a year or two later, and I've never seen anything like them on any other post-Code romance comics.

Bride's Secrets #8 (Jun 1955), perhaps inspired by Norman Rockwell 'gossip' covers for The Saturday Evening Post


AJAX COMIC
CONFESSIONS OF LOVE!
Bride's Secrets
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
IT'S NOT TRUE! DON'T BELIEVE THEM! I AM NOT A TWO-TIMER!
also in this issue
ALL DRESSED IN WHITE!

Many of the Ajax romance stories were almost unbelievably shallow, especially in light of superior work by DC, Marvel, Prize, ACG and Harvey in the post-Code period.

My favorite Ajax story was reprinted a few years ago by New England Comics in *My Terrible Romance*—the infamous tale entitled "There's No Romance in Rock and Roll!" from *True Life Romance* #3 (August 1956), the last issue.

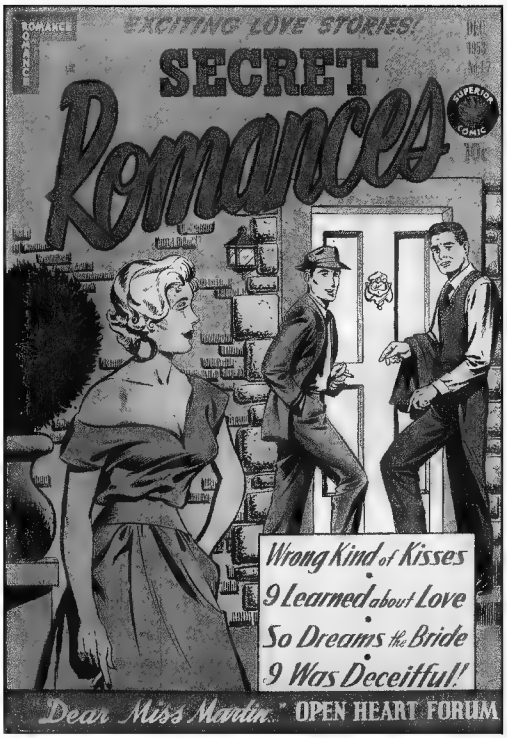
This 6-page epic was introduced with the following nearly incomprehensible psychobabble: "No one understands the teenagers? That's because they don't want to be understood! It points out our own flaws, our pretense that we're so important, we have to have a world of our own! But the grown-ups should be patient with us, because I happen to know we suddenly open our eyes and our hearts as I did when I met my boyfriend and realized at last that... there's no romance in rock and roll!"

In this strange tale, high school rebel Shirley defies her parents and chooses a boy who (horrors!) likes rock and roll before she realizes that a clean-cut fellow who prefers better music is preferable to both Shirley and her parents.

"Gee, I can't believe that I ever enjoyed that horrible rock and roll stuff—it's just plain noise!" she says in the last panel. "Right! It'll never take the place of a sweet love song... by the way, let's get some records to share..." her newfound love replies.

Bill Haley and the Comets were plain noise? Hmmm... I wonder what Shirley and her boyfriend would think of Metallica?

In this same issue of *True Life Romance*, an often-used full-page Ajax house ad shamelessly plugs all eight of the company's romance titles as "the best in love magazines!"—yet six of the eight were doomed to immi-



Secret Romances #17 (Dec 1953), Superior Comic titles originated in Canada but were sold on both sides of the border

nent cancellation and the other two a six-month hiatus!

Ajax romance comics are often characterized by amazingly wordy stories—sometimes the art (such as it is) is crowded to a degree that the stories become little more than talking heads.

For the most part, the art ranges from mediocre to awful. Nothing of the caliber the Iger shop did for Quality and Fiction House in the early 1940s; although there is a lot of experimentation in some of the panels, with female arms and legs frequently extending out of the panels.

The story titles, though, are astonishingly original compared to most romance comics. For example, in *Bride's Diary* #5 (July 1955), two of the stories are entitled "My Private Panic" and "You Can't Take Back Your Kisses!" In *Lonely Heart* #14 (February 1956), we have "Your Voice is My Song!" and "I Am So Lucky in Love!"

On the other hand, Ajax went to the other extreme in *My Personal Problem* #1 (November 1955), with the prosaic "She Came Back," "Boomerang," "Rejected" and "Too Young To Date?" Ajax liked that title—My Personal Problem—so much that the company used it twice, with the first series running four issues and the second series lasting three. From my viewpoint, I'm kind of surprised the Comics Code allowed that title.

The history of Ajax has been a challenge. One of the most difficult pieces of comic detective work involved solving the secrets of *All True Romance*. The Ajax run goes from #22 through #30, then changes to #3 (September 1957) and #4 (November 1957) before shifting back to #33 (February 1958) and finishing with #34 (July 1958) the month that Ajax killed all of its titles. This took me years to solve!

Superior Comics, the Canadian firm that sold comics in the United States, published several romance titles with art and stories almost identical to Ajax, since the Iger shop was employed by both companies. Robert Farrell was also involved with Superior, which went out of business in 1956. I vividly recall wondering—as a budding 8-year-old comics historian who even read the indicias!—why the Comics Code seal wasn't on Superior titles such as *US Fighting Air Force* and *My Secret Marriage*.

Superior published eight issues of *My Secret* (#1-3)/*Our Secret* (#4-8) in 1949-50, then went whole hog (for such a small company) with *Secret Romances* #1-27 in 1951-55, *Love and Marriage* #1-16 in 1952-54, *G.I. War Brides* #1-8 in 1954-55 and *My Secret Marriage* #1-24 in 1953-56. I'm not sure whether Ajax ever reprinted any Superior stories (or vice versa), but they look virtually identical in style.

Ajax occasionally would reprint a romance story, but I believe the titles were almost always changed. It's interesting to note that most of the titles of the stories were presented in such a way—a white bar across the splash page—that the titles could be changed without having to rework anything else.

Until next time, may all your personal problems be small.

Ajax Romance Comics

Bride's Secrets #1 (May 1954) to #19 (May 1958)
All True Romance #22 (Mar 1955) to #30 (Jul 1957); #3 (Sep 1957) to #4 (Nov 1957); #33 (Feb 1958) to #34 (Jun 1958)
Bride's Diary #4 (May 1955) to #10 (Aug 1956)
Lonely Heart #9 (Mar 1955) to #14 (Feb 1956); becomes **Dear Heart** #15 (May 1956) to #16 (Sep 1956)
My Personal Problem (first series) #1 (Nov 1955) to #4 (Nov 1956)
Today's Brides #1 (Nov 1955) to #4 (Nov 1956)
Secret Love (first series) #1 (Dec 1955) to #3 (Aug 1956)
True Life Romance #1 (Dec 1955) to #3 (Aug 1956)
My Personal Problem (second series) #1 (Oct 1957) to #3 (May 1958)
Secret Love (second series) #1 (Apr 1957) to #6 (Jun 1958)

Gray Morrow: Man of Many Visions

by Bill Baker

Chances are, even if you firmly believe that you've never seen the work of Gray Morrow, that you have—and the chances are even better that you not only enjoyed it immensely, but that his work has left an indelible mark somewhere in your mind, conscious or not. That's because this incredibly talented artist has produced so much memorable work, in such a wide array of media and for such an astounding range of venues, that it is literally almost impossible not to have encountered his work somewhere, sometime, if you've had any interest in any kind of pop culture during the past forty plus years.

This simple truth, in turn, leads to a realization that, considering the depth and breadth of Morrow's career—which ranges from creating comic books and comic strips, to magazine and book covers, to animation storyboards and movie posters, and then back again—it's more than a little difficult to find a focal point when discussing his work, aside from the fact that it is so memorable and timeless. Ask anyone who is familiar with the man's work, and they will wax eloquent concerning his ability to capture not just a pose, but the raw emotion behind it—his sublime skill at not just setting the scene, but evoking the rare atmosphere of an alien world—and his craft at capturing not just a great moment, but the very essence of an entire story.

In short, Gray Morrow isn't just a consummate professional, he is truly one of the great ones. An artist's artist.

BILL BAKER: *Why don't we start by talking about your early roots as an artist? You decided at an early age that you'd become an artist, didn't you?*

MORROW: Oh, yeah. I guess since I was old enough to read the funnies, I was swept away.

BB: *What are some of the reasons you were so drawn to art?*

MORROW: Well, let's see…I don't know, I was always drawn to music, but I had no facility for it. Loved the movies, of course. And the Sunday funnies, and the Saturday funnies. And comic books. It was all grist for the mill, I guess.

BB: *Were there any particular favorites that might have had an influence upon the direction you've taken?*

MORROW: Oh, well the obvious ones, of course. Like *Prince Valiant*, and *Flash Gordon*. More obscure ones like *Red Ryder*, and *King of the Royal Mounted*. The whole scope and breadth of it, I guess. I was equally impressed with *Dick Tracy*, even though the art style's nothing like Alex Raymond.

BB: *Do you think that the common denominator amongst all of these is the quality of storytelling?*

MORROW: Yeah, I was fascinated with a good, observant tale. The other main influence was the radio dramas. I never missed *The Shadow* or *Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons*. *The Saint*. All of the escapist-type fare.

BB: *It's really hard to explain, especially to the younger generations, that people used to just sit around and listen to stories. Do you think that doing that helped foster your rich visual imagination, rather than stunt it, as some might think?*

MORROW: Yes, I would say so. The beauty of radio drama was that the visualization was all in your imagination. These characters looked, in your mind, however you wanted them to look. I was always shocked and surprised when I'd find a copy

of *Radio Mirror* magazine, when they had pictures of the performers, because they looked *nothing* like I'd imagine. [*General laughter*]

BB: *Ah, the ideal versus the reality!*
MORROW: Oh, yeah.

BB: *I know you were a huge fan of the movies, as well.*
MORROW: Oh, yes.

BB: *What about the movies, aside from the pure escapism, appealed to you?*
MORROW: Well, as I grew into my teens, I think I made it to the movies sometimes as many as two or three times a week. And, in those days, local theaters changed the program two or three times a week, so I saw a lot of movies. And, of course, every genre is interesting because it was escapist fare. You had your swashbucklers with Errol Flynn, you had the westerns.

BB: *Were you conscious of how films influenced your own attempts at storytelling, or was it subtler than that?*
MORROW: Yes. I think I absorbed it by osmosis without really trying to formalize it, put it down. [It was more like I] was just, by watching this stuff, trying to capture that feeling. I did my best to put it on paper.

BB: *Did you ever have any "formal" art training, or are you basically self-taught?*
MORROW: Yeah, briefly. When I finished high school, I moved from my hometown [Fort Wayne, Indiana] to Chicago because it was the nearest large city, and offered the best opportunity. And I enrolled in the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts for, what was it? Two nights a week.

The instructor was an illustrator by the name of Jerry Warshaw. I think I studied there for, maybe, three or four months, then Jerry said, "You're hot to trot [and ready for] doing the comics. There's not much more I can tell you. Go to New York and get started." So that's what I did. That's the limit of my formal education, as far as art's concerned.

BB: *So the idea of penciling and inking just seemed to come naturally to you, then?*
MORROW: Yeah, because I was always doing it. You know, I've always maintained that anyone can learn to play an instrument, or draw a picture with some facility, as long as they practice enough.

That's certainly what I did. I always had pencil and paper handy.

BB: *Right. The statement, "Oh, he's self-taught," ignores the obvious, doesn't it. It always seems to skip over the simple fact that it took hours and hours of practice to reach that point.*

So, what were those early days as a struggling artist in New York like, and what kind of lessons did your early professional life teach you?

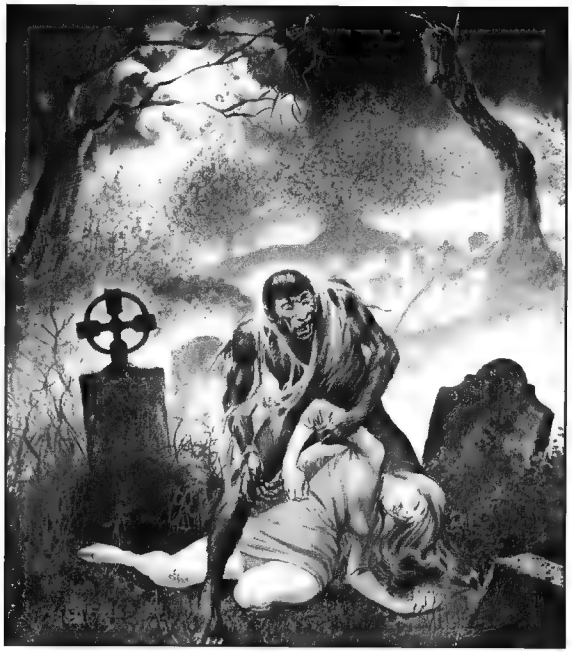
MORROW: Well, they were kinda rough, and my timing was bad. I arrived in New York just when the Comics Code Authority was getting under way, and comics publishers were folding faster than I could get around to them. So there were some lean, hungry days. I don't know, I must have gone up to Marvel five or ten times before I finally got a script. I think I just made enough of a nuisance of myself [until they gave me work].

BB: *So persistence was one of the things that taught you, then.*
MORROW: It helps! [*General laughter*]

BB: *What kind of work were you doing in that early period? Anything in particular that sticks out in your mind?*
MORROW: Well, let's see. I did, as far as I know, the first Conan comic book, for a small operation called Triangle Publications. I got paid for it, but it never saw print. It's still moldering on a shelf somewhere, I presume.

BB: *And, since there weren't copy machines around then, you probably don't even have copies of the work, do you?*
MORROW: No, not at all. I guess the main thing I did was little short, three to five pagers for Marvel. Mystery and science fiction things. And westerns.

BB: *How'd you feel about that work? Was it mainly a job for you, or did you get some real joy in doing those short pieces?*
MORROW: Oh, I loved it.



BB: *Do you have any particular favorite stories that you worked on from then?*

MORROW: I don't remember any of them, they're all a blur now. [*General laughter*]

BB: *Well, those lean times did eventually turn around for you. And you got to meet a really good core group of people, artists who eventually became not just your friends, but legends in their own right: Wally Wood, Frank Frazetta, and Al Williamson, among others. How important, personally and professionally, has your friendship with these folks been to you?*

MORROW: Well, they were a great bunch of guys. We all hung out together. We played ball in the park, chased girls, went camping, went to the movies, talked art endlessly.

BB: *Anything in particular from those days that made a big impact on you? Any advice, or simple approaches to work that they might have shared with you?*

MORROW: They turned me on to their influences. Artists I wasn't aware of, coming from the Midwest. British illustrators. [The Italian illustrator Fortunino] Metania, [as well as American artists] J. C. [Joseph Clement] Coll, [and J. R.] Flannigan. [These gentlemen were all magazine] illustrators from the turn of the century, and the early years of the twentieth century. These were all new to me, and very stimulating.

BB: *What about their work really struck you, and stayed with you?*

MORROW: Well, I had been inspired by the illustrators that I saw in the current magazines of the day, like *Saturday Evening Post*, or *Colliers*, but I had never heard of these guys before. And there was a grace and buoyancy that I think they captured that hasn't been done since, except [as] transposed influence in guys like Williamson, Frazetta, [and Roy] Krenkel.

BB: *Some of your work, particular in the comics area, that's often mentioned by fans as their favorite is probably your work for Jim Warren's line. How did your work with him come about, and what was it like working there?*

MORROW: I can't recall what I was working on at the time, but I think it was Joe Orlando I bumped into somewhere, and he told me about this fella who was starting up a black and white magazine that wouldn't be under the Comics Code Authority. That was interesting in itself, right from the start. And I found out that Williamson and [Angelo] Torres were also interested, they'd heard about it, too.

I can't remember my first meeting with Warren, but he'd heard of my work and gave me a script, and kept me pretty busy from then on.

BB: *Are you pretty happy with that work, now? Do you think it holds up today?*

MORROW: The Warren work, you mean?

BB: *Yeah.*

MORROW: Fifty-fifty. Some of it was pretty rushed.

BB: *Any particular writer you liked working with at Warren?*

MORROW: Oh, yeah: Archie Goodwin.

BB: *What about his scripts did you appreciate the most?*

MORROW: Well, Archie was the kind of writer you could make a suggestion to, a sentence or two, of the kind of thing you'd like to draw, and he could magically come up with a script that was *exactly* what you had in mind.

BB: *What kind of scripts did he supply you with, a barebones plot or something fully fleshed out?*

MORROW: A full script.

BB: *Something with all the breakdowns and layouts indicated in them?*

MORROW: Yes. Occasionally he'd doodle in a little notepad. Like rough sketches. Not for every script, but I'd put them up on my easel, and they were a big help.

BB: *You mentioned the fact that not working under the Comics Code restrictions was intriguing, and pretty rare those days.*

MORROW: Oh, yeah.

BB: *Aside from the purely economic impact--the fact that a lot of publishers and work just disappeared -- what kind of impact did those strictures have on you and the kind of work you were trying to do back then?*

MORROW: Well, as I said, I kept pretty busy, because I was doing other things as well. I was working in television, doing illustrations for paperbacks, the science fiction magazines, the digest size magazines.

BB: *Did the Code have an impact on you artistically? Did you ever find yourself self-editing, or pulling back on your presentation or storytelling?*

MORROW: Oh, sure. I mean, any of the Code[-approved] stuff was frustrating, because they were censoring everything. I mean to the point of being ridiculous. [For instance,] when somebody would get sapped over the head in your script, with a blackjack, they'd white out the blackjack. Which was pointless.

BB: *It must have been almost impossible to tell stories under those conditions, at times. Literally.*

MORROW: Well, they were having a good time "X-ing" things out. [*General laughter*] I mean, it's not that comic books were overly sexy, or unusually violent, except for a couple of rare instances.

BB: *And in most of the cases it seems like what they were reacting to wasn't gratuitous violence, etc., there was a reason for it. It was something that was vital to the story itself.*

MORROW: Absolutely.

BB: *Well, you mentioned your work in other mediums, which I really do want to talk about. For instance, when you do a poster, or a cover for a magazine or paperback, or even a spot illustration, how different is your approach to creating that kind of work from the sequential work that you do?*

MORROW: Well, you're faced with coming up with a composition or design that tells a story, or maybe an isolated instant of the story, but it's got to be very descriptive. Aside from that...

Every panel that you do in sequential art is a challenge, too. It must be done in such a way that it moves the story along. So it doesn't matter too much whether you're doing a whole series of pictures, or one. The problems are pretty much the same.

BB: *One thing I wanted to discuss for a few moments was your involvement in the Red Circle line of comics that were published by Archie. How'd your involvement in that project come about?*

MORROW: I don't remember the details [outside of the fact that] they contacted me, and offered me the opportunity to package the material for them. And it was an interesting challenge, because it would be the first time I was on the other side of the desk, to act as an editor and publisher.

BB: *So how did you put the line together? Did you call in a bunch of your friends, or did you basically open it up to anyone who could do the work well?*

MORROW: Well, it was a mixed bag. I contacted all the people I admired most in the business, as well as a few tyros, or neophytes, that had promise. For instance, one of the writers I used, Marvin Channing, was a school teacher friend of a friend of mine, and he had never written any comic material before. But he was very excited by the prospect, and I think he did a marvelous job.

BB: *How did you approach editing the line? Did you leave it largely up to the people you hired, or were you more hands on, contributing plots and scripts and such to get the ball rolling?*

MORROW: Well, I wrote several of the stories myself, and illustrated them. And I tried just matching people up. Writers with artists that I thought would make a good combination. All in all, I think the material turned out pretty well.

BB: *Are there one or two issues, or even entire runs of books, that you're particularly proud of, or think turned out just right?*

MORROW: Probably the first two or three. I took an extra measure of care [with those]. Then there's that old bugaboo, the deadline, and I think some of the later issues showed that, showed that they were rushed. But I'd say the first two or three were the best.

BB: *What brought the line to an end, as far as you can recollect? Was it a drop in sales, or were there other factors that brought it all to a halt?*

MORROW: I never really knew why it was all put on hold. The reason given to me was that the sales didn't warrant continuing with the material. But [then,] sometime later, a year or two later, I met one of the salesmen for the company who told me that the books were doing *very* well, but they were stopped by the publisher [of Archie], John Goldwater. [As far as] whatever particular personal reasons he had, I have no idea. But he's the one who called a halt to it.

BB: *What did that experience teach you, what kind of lessons did you learn from that period?*

MORROW: [*Slight laugh*] Well, the main one was I *much* preferred being on my side of the desk.

BB: *Was it a bit of a relief to leave the editorial side of things to others, and just get back to creating stories?*

MORROW: Absolutely. [*General laughter*]

No, it's much easier to sit and work from a script, and have that be your main concern, than trying to handle dealing with artists, and writers, and being a traffic manager for the whole thing, to make it come out right.

BB: *Now, you also did some work for Charlton, didn't you?*

MORROW: Well, that was the *Space: 1999* stuff, yes.

BB: *How'd that job come about, and what was it like working on that particular book?*

MORROW: Again, I'm not quite sure at this point exactly how it came about, except I remember that they contacted me and offered me a page rate that was too low to suit me, and I was busy with other material. So I gave them a price that I didn't think that they could meet. Much to my surprise, they called me back ten minutes later, saying, "You got it," so I was stuck. [*General laughter*]

BB: *So, how did you like working on that book? I know that, sometimes with licensed properties, they can be a real pain.*

MORROW: They left me pretty much alone. They furnished me with all kinds of material. Movie stills, reference model kits, whatever I needed. I enjoyed the show. It was sort of a rip-off of *Star Trek*, but it had its moments, and they had some nice special effects. Sometime later, at a convention up in Boston, I met the cast and crew. Primarily, the guy who played the doctor on the show, Barry Morse, was a delightful man. And I remember teasing him about the outfits they had to wear. What he wanted to wear was a pair of sneakers and an old cardigan, and not wear these slinky bell bottom trousers.

BB: *How was a typical issue of that series created?*

MORROW: You know, I don't even remember who wrote the scripts. Probably, it was Nick Cuti, but after all these years I can't recall.

BB: *So you'd just get a basically full script, and go from that?*

MORROW: Yes.

BB: *Didn't you also do* The Six Million Dollar Man *there, as well?*

MORROW: Hm, did I? Yeah, I guess I did.

BB: *Is that one that's lost in the mists of time for you?*

MORROW: I seem to remember doing something on that, but I don't recall anything more. I think Neal Adams helped me on some of it.

BB: *Really? Did Neal help you with a number of things, or was that the only time?*

MORROW: No, just that one job.

BB: *Was he doing the inks, the finishes for you?*

MORROW: Good question. I can't remember at this point.

BB: *Well, you also had a hand in at DC Comics. As a matter of fact, you helped create the El Diablo character, didn't you?*

MORROW: Oh, my, yeah. Well, I designed the costume.

BB: *How'd that particular job happen? Did they contact you, or ...?*

MORROW: I was always lobbying for a chance to do a western. I guess they finally heard me.

BB: *Did that turn into something more for you?*

MORROW: Well, if I recall, it was only two or three jobs. It was a backup feature, anyway. It was not the star of the book.

BB: *Well, even though it was just a small taste of things, did that start getting more towards the kind of things you wanted to do with the western genre, or did it leave a little to be desired?*

MORROW: Oh, I thought the concept was rather silly. You know, DC's version of Zorro. It had very little to do with anything realistic. But it gave me the opportunity to draw the costumes, and the horses, and the guns, all of which I enjoy.

BB: *Almost getting back to your roots, then, back when you were teaching yourself to draw, and playing cowboy all day as a youngster.* [General laughter]

Were there any other DC jobs that you remember fondly?

MORROW: Well, I did a run of *The Spectre*. That was a character that was fun to draw.

BB: *That's right, all of the cosmic adventures.*

MORROW: Right.

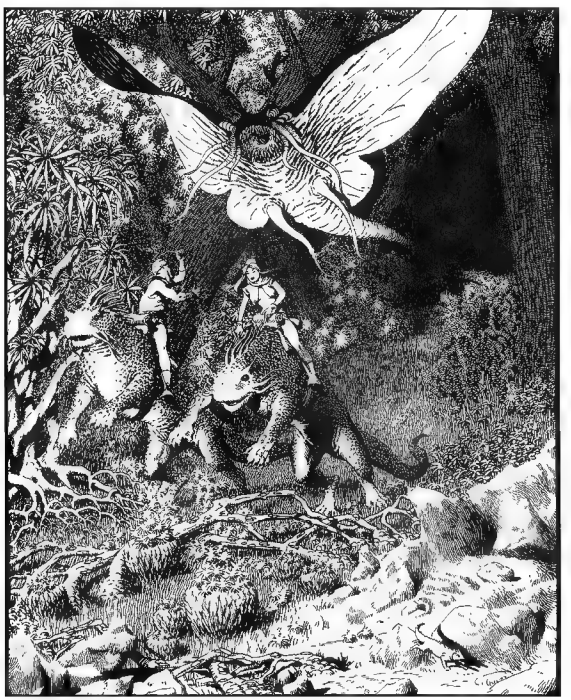
BB: What about that book did you find particularly satisfying?

MORROW: Well, you know, it's fantasy material. The challenge to do this cosmic entity that called for a lot of special effects. That was interesting to work out.

BB: *Smashing someone over the head with planets, and such.*

MORROW: Yeah, right. [*General laughter*]

BB: *Actually, that run made a* big *impression on me when I first read it. I can remember just being in awe of how you were able to achieve those effects, and yet have them seem realistic. Did that take a lot of work for you, or did some of the solutions just seem to come naturally?*



MORROW: Well, I was very much into it while doing it. Yes, I'd say it came naturally.

BB: *What about the character himself? Did you feel a bit of a connection to him?*

MORROW: I think [it was] here I am, an adult, doing one more character I grew up reading, and enjoying, as a kid. You know, I've been *very* fortunate in that respect. I've had a chance to do Prince Valiant, Flash Gordon, Buck Rogers, Spectre, The Vigilante. All these characters that I enjoyed so much as a kid, I found myself doing. Even Superman, I had a shot at.

BB: *On Superman, do you remember anything special about that job?*

MORROW: I can't remember much about it, except the nucleus of the main character—Madame Xanadu, another fantasy type character—[that, and that the plot revolved around the fact] that Superman was in a lot of trouble because there were evil forces at work that his super powers didn't have much effect upon. [That] and, again, here I was doing [work on] another one of my icons.

BB: *Have you ever wanted to have another crack at* Prince Valiant, or Flash Gordon*?*

MORROW: Oh, I'd love to do *Flash Gordon*. Anytime, anywhere. I could do that forever, and more.

BB: I*s it the fact that* Flash *allows you to do just about any kind of story within its framework, and it's an action-adventure science fiction strip, or is there more to it than that?*

MORROW: Well, of all of the comic strip characters that made an impression upon me, I guess the Flash Gordon character had the most impact. I loved everything about it. The whole concept. I was very frustrated. I only did it a couple of months, but I quite happily could have continued on it, ad infinitum.

BB: *Are there any strips that you read today that you really enjoy, or do you feel that a lot of what interested you in the form has fallen away over the years?*

MORROW: Well, the newspaper strips, the continuity strips, the adventure strips, are all but gone from the newspapers. I don't enjoy what I see in the papers these days. I can't think of one I would walk across the street and buy a paper for.

BB: *There's that Frank Cho [the crazed mind behind* Liberty Meadows*, and one of Morrow's studio mates] guy, but I suspect that you get his collections free.*

MORROW: Yeah, I get complimentary copies. Frank is one of the brightest lights in the strip business today. I wish there were more like him.

BB: *What qualities of his work appeal to you?*

MORROW: [*Laughter*] His irreverence, and sense of humor. And his drawing ability, even for somebody as young as he is, is spectacular.

BB: *Yeah, sometimes it seems he's almost channeling Booth and a few other people at the same time. And he's able to render a fairly beautiful woman, isn't he?*

MORROW: [*Chuckling*] He's one of the best.

BB: *With* Tarzan, *I know that's a character who's near and dear to your heart, too. Do you think that's a strip that you can just keep drawing forever?*

MORROW: It seems like I have been! [*General laughter*] Yes, I enjoy *Tarzan*, still, after all these years.

BB: *How's the work done on that? Do you get small bits of the script, or do you get a full plot for the entire storyline?*

MORROW: Usually I get a full script for the whole episode. Twelve, thirteen, fourteen weeks, complete.

BB: *Does the shrinking size of the strip when it's printed in the newspapers having any kind of an effect upon your approach to the work?*

MORROW: Yes, it's *forced* me to simplify drastically. Because the thing is printed so small in some of the papers, the panels are not much larger, in some cases, than a postage stamp. So it has to be the distilled essence. Simplicity. It can't be noodled up with a bunch of scratch lines. You've got to keep it simple.

BB: *Are there any characters you haven't had a chance to work on that you'd love to do someday?*

MORROW: Oh, yeah. I'd *love* to do *The Shadow*, for instance.

BB: *Would you want to do something original with that, or perhaps an adaptation of one of the pulps?*

MORROW: Well, it wouldn't matter. As long as it was *The Shadow.* Or the *Green Hornet.*

BB: *Is it the sense of mystery, that noir-pulpy essence that surrounds them, that appeals to you?*

MORROW: It's definitely that, and there was something, to my mind, somewhat more plausible about a guy who still dressed in civilian clothes, instead of putting on red tights, to fight crime. They seemed a little more believable.

BB: *Yeah, those red tights do kinda stand out in a crowd, don't they?* [General chuckling]

MORROW: Yes. The whole idea that one had to change clothes every time he is called upon to go into action seemed like a distressing annoyance, and inconvenient.

THE NEW BOOK

CBM: *You've got a new book,* Gray Morrow Visionary, *coming out through the Insight Studios Group, concentrating on your body of work. Mark Wheatley, the editor of the book, said that they could easily do six or more books covering your work. What do you hope that this book is going to be offering readers that they might not have seen before?*

MORROW: Probably some of the things which would be unfamiliar to fans would be the children's books I did. I did about 50 children's books [for the Bobbs Merrill series of] biographies of famous Americans. Let's see, what else? The movie posters [that I did for Sam Sherman's Independent-International Pictures in the 70s].

CBM: *That brings up an interesting point. Even though a lot of readers might assume they've never seen your work in those two fields, there's a fair chance that they have actually seen or even read them. After all, those biographies are still in print, right?*

MORROW: Yeah, that's what Mark tells me.

CBM: *How's that feel, the fact that something you did a few decades back is still in print, and being read today?*

MORROW: Well, gratifying, I guess. [*General laughter*]

CBM: *One of the things that I was struck by when I was looking through the proofs for the* Visionary *book, and which Mark [Wheatley] commented on in particular, is the fact that you have a tendency to continue working on a painting after you've gotten the piece back from a publisher. Do you still do that?*

MORROW: Yes, I have that inclination.

CBM: *Is it because you're not satisfied with the painting, or is there more to it?*

MORROW: It's certainly not always the case, but every once in a while I do something sort of under pressure, under the gun, because the deadline is short, and I take some shortcuts that I wouldn't ordinarily do. So, when I get the painting back and I have the leisure time, I complete the painting to my own satisfaction.

CBM: *Will this be the first time that these pieces that you've continued to work on after their initial publication will see the light of day, or did they get reused elsewhere?*

MORROW: No, this will be the first time they'll be seen, anywhere.

CBM: *Well, what are your thoughts on the book, now that you've had a chance to look through the proofs?*

MORROW: Well, I'm frankly very impressed with what Mark and Allan [Gross] have done. I think they've done a remarkable job.

CBM: *Were there any surprises for you in there?*

MORROW: The whole thing is a surprise to me! [*General laughter*] I keep wondering who this guy Gray Morrow is, I don't recognize him.

CBM: *Were some of the surprises due to the fact that you were seeing some pieces that you'd done, but had forgotten about?*

MORROW: Yeah. In a lot of ways, the thing was like a time trip, because they found pieces of art from 20, 30 years ago that I've long since forgotten.

CBM: *I imagine that there were some pieces that were a pleasant surprise to see, but were there any that weren't quite so pleasant to be reminded of?*

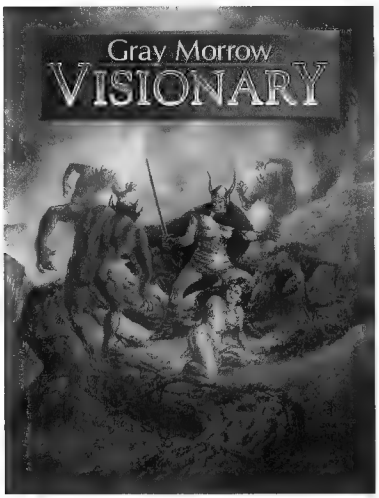
MORROW: There were a few in there that made me wince, yes. [*General laughter*]

CBM: *Were there any that you kind of marveled at, wondering exactly how you got them done under the deadline?*

MORROW: I'll tell you, since I was always inclined to experiment, I found several pieces that I'll be damned if I know how I did 'em.

CBM: *What do you hope that readers get from this book?*

MORROW: I just hope they enjoy it as much as I did doing them.



Gray Morrow Visionary, published by Insight Studios Group, is due in comic book shops this August

BB: *Any other characters that pop to mind that you'd like a swing at?*

MORROW: Another old favorite radio show: *The Lone Ranger.*

BB: *That mixes up both the realistic mystery and adventure stuff with the western settings that you love so much. I can see why you'd like to do that. But it does seem that it's been a while since anyone really caught the public's imagination with that particular character.*

MORROW: No. I guess the TV show is still in syndication, so somebody's still out there, watching it.

BB: *What about the Lone Ranger do you like, in particular?*

MORROW: Oh, just anything to do with westerns is something that appeals to me.

BB: *Who would have thunk, eh?* [General laughter] *You're self-taught as a painter as well, aren't you?*

MORROW: Yes.

BB: *It sounds almost as if that was something you just decided to pick up one day during your tour of duty in Korea. What do you remember about those days?*

MORROW: I was assigned to what they called "Fox Company", which was another name for "Fuck-Up Company." [*General laughter*] All the misfits, for some reason, ended up on Walmi-do Island, in Inchon. The assignment was guarding the [oil] pipeline, and I managed to avoid that when they found out I could paint and draw. So I had a lot of spare time. Since I didn't have to walk guard, I spent a lot of time in the recreation club. And I picked up some Chinese brushes, and some paints, and started playing with it, because I resented having my career interrupted by the Army. I thought I'd use my time to develop my painting abilities so I could use that [skill] when I got back to civilian life.

BB: *When it comes to working in a medium, do you have a preference? Such as, say, painting versus pen and ink?*

MORROW: I guess not. I like working in black and white, and line. And tone. Full color painting. It's kind of refreshing to switch from one to another.

BB: *Are you able to use both effectively, in your opinion, to accomplish the same kind of desired effects, whether it's atmospheric or emotive, or do you find yourself wanting to use a certain technique more than another to get the look you want?*

MORROW: No, there are tricks for every medium. Just by experimenting, you just pretty much find them all.

BB: *The trial and error method, then.*

MORROW: Exactly.

BB: *You also mentioned your TV work. One of the pleasant surprises for me, personally, when I got this assignment was finding out that you were the "key frames" artist for the original* Spider-Man *animated show back in the late 60s, early 70s. What was that like, was it a lot of fun for you?*

MORROW: Yeah, it was a new medium, and it was a kick to see my drawings on the screen, moving.

BB: *That must have almost been a childhood dream come true for you, combining a lot of your early loves into one big package.*

MORROW: It was very enjoyable.

BB: *Now, I noticed that you were supplying up to 150 of these key frames, these individual drawings of the key moments in each animated episode,* every *week at the time. Were you doing other work at the same time?*

MORROW: Oh, yeah.

BB: *And, at this point, this is* without *assistants, correct?*

MORROW: Correct. [*General laughter*]

BB: *Uhm, I don't ask this lightly, but what were your work habits back then? Were you doing 16-hour days back then?*

MORROW: No. You know, eight-hour days, I would say. The TV set-ups were merely little pencil drawings [with] only the smallest of background indications. The main thing I was most concerned with were the figures.

BB: *Now, one of the things that seems to be typical of your work in general, and is especially true of your science fiction covers, is the sense that you're not just displaying a figure; you're putting that figure in the context of a world. How much thought do you put into the backgrounds, and the placement of the figures in that space?*

MORROW: Well, one of the joys, for me, of science fiction and fantasy was the very idea of creating a whole world, a whole environment, and attempting not to repeat oneself. That was the kick.

BB: *Do you have any particular favorite pieces from your book illustration work?*

MORROW: Doing *The Hobbit*, the big coffee table book.

BB: *The edition that included a series of interior spot illustrations, right?*

MORROW: Right.

BB: *Do you usually read the work you're creating a cover for? I ask, because I know that for the* Perry Rhodan *books, you typically went off of [series editor Forrest] Ackerman's plot descriptions. When you're doing the spot illustrations and such, do you typically give the work a thorough reading first?*

MORROW: Usually I do. The *Perry Rhodan*s were an exception to the rule. After trying to read a couple of them, I found it much easier to work from a synopsis, because they were pretty much all the same, anyway.

BB: *Yeah, I think they might be the closest thing to the pulps that we've had for quite a while.*

MORROW: Yeah, that's a good description.

BB: *Getting back to your work habits for a moment, do you still work eight hours a day?*

MORROW: Well, six to eight hours, I would say. I have a couple of cups of coffee in the morning, and I've got a short commute. It's only ten steps from my house to my studio. I take a break for lunch, and knock off at five or six in the afternoon, and relax for the rest of the day.

BB: *Are you still producing as much as you used to?*

MORROW: Not at all, no. The comics, really, are down the tubes.

BB: *Well, you seem to have gone back towards the comic strip format more these days, except in an online format. Do you think we'll be seeing more of that work from you in the future?*

MORROW: Well, I hope so!

BB: *One of the things we haven't touched on yet is the fact that you were right there, in the beginning of the independent comics movement in the 70s, with the likes of Neal Adams. Will we be seeing your creator-owned series* Orion *coming back in some way or shape sometime soon?*

MORROW: Well, I'd like nothing better. One of my other properties, *Edge of Chaos*, is going to be incorporated into *The Body* [online comic] strip that I'm doing for Mark.

BB: *Might that lead to you returning to writing again, and perhaps doing the strip online, or even in print?*

MORROW: Well, at this point in time, I couldn't say. It's much to be desired. I would love it.

BB: *Yeah, I think there's a* bunch *of us who would love it! When you're writing for yourself, how did you work? Did you create a full script ahead of time, or plot it out and do thumbnails, or did you have a different approach than either of those?*

MORROW: Well, I wrote the whole thing up, long hand. I don't type.

Writing is something that never came easily for me. But, once committed to it, I just kept at it until I got what I wanted. I'd start with a rough outline, then develop it from that point on. Then refine it, until I finally had something that looked like a finished script.

BB: *Would you dialogue it at that point, or wait until you'd laid it all out or drawn it?*

MORROW: No. Once I was into working on a full script, the dialogue came naturally, I guess.

BB: *I know you're widely read. Is there anyone who might have had particular influence on you as a writer?*

MORROW: Dashiell Hammett. Raymond Chandler. Sax Rohmer. Mervyn Peake.

BB: *What qualities appealed to you, and how might those show up in your own storytelling?*

MORROW: Well, they were all great storytellers. They evoked mood and atmosphere. In general, all the old pulps told a story that *moved.* I guess that was the main thing that impressed me, that I tried to emulate, was a story that *moved.*

Even today, when I pick up a paperback, if I'm not sucked into it in the first couple of pages, I don't bother finishing it. I put it down, and go look for something else.

BB: *What do you do these days for enjoyment, and to relax?*

MORROW: Well, I have AMC [American Movie Classics] and TCM [Turner Classic Movie channels] on the tube, with commercial-free movies. I have a library of, I guess, about a thousand films. So I still see half a dozen movies per week, if not more.

BB: *If somebody asked you for some of the main things they'd need to know to succeed as an artist, what advice might you offer them?*

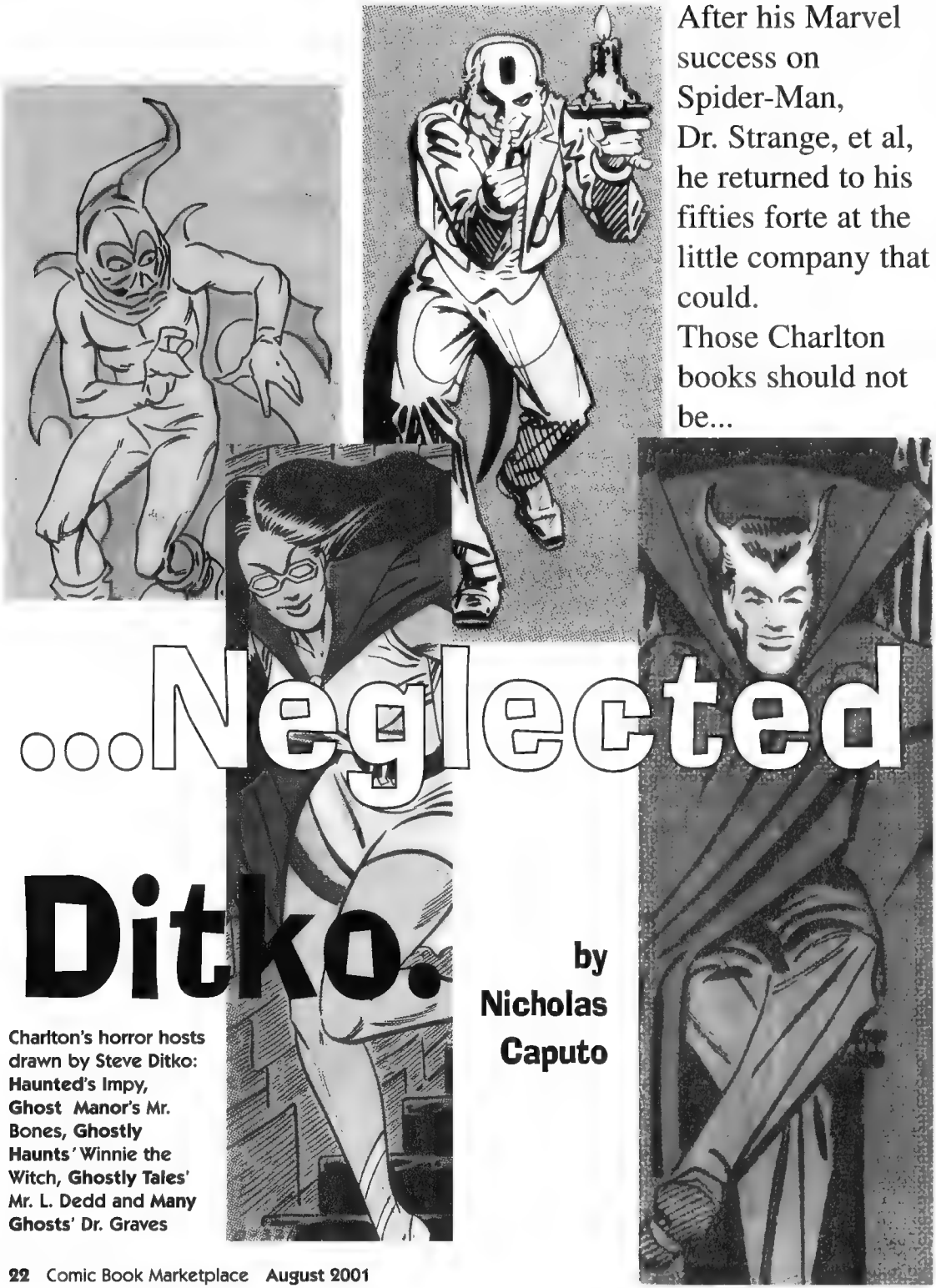
MORROW: Oh, boy! [*Laughter*]

BB: *And please realize, I'm not necessarily asking about just techniques, but the other, important qualities that make for an exception artist, in your opinion.*

MORROW: Let me think...Well, business-wise, cover yourself, and protect yourself with a written agreement, a contract, where ever possible. Make sure that it's crystal clear what is expected of you, and do your best to do it.

As far as the work itself, I guess the main thing that I would emphasis is stick to the things you *really* enjoy, because if you really enjoy it, it'll show. Just as, when you *don't* enjoy it, that'll show, too.

BB: *That sounds like some good advice to follow, no matter* what *you chose to do for a living.*



After his Marvel success on Spider-Man, Dr. Strange, et al, he returned to his fifties forte at the little company that could.
Those Charlton books should not be...

...Neglected Ditko.

by Nicholas Caputo

Charlton's horror hosts drawn by Steve Ditko: **Haunted**'s Impy, **Ghost Manor**'s Mr. Bones, **Ghostly Haunts**' Winnie the Witch, **Ghostly Tales**' Mr. L. Dedd and **Many Ghosts**' Dr. Graves

Much has been written about Steve Ditko's work in the years since he first set pencil to paper some 45 years ago. His contribution to the creation of Spider-Man and Doctor Strange with Stan Lee at Marvel Comics alone would assure him a place in the history of comic art, and there are numerous examples of his style that have been justly acknowledged as superior, such as his beautiful black and white stories for Warren Magazines in the mid-1960s; his stint on *Thunder Agents* with Wally Wood, and his imaginative heroes like The Creeper and The Hawk and The Dove for DC. His more personal stories emphasizing his libertarian beliefs, with characters such as Mr. A, have been argued and debated by fans, as have his initial horror stories for Charlton Comics in the 1950s (which are splendid nascent works deserving of examination) and his work on Captain Atom, Blue Beetle and The Question for the aforesaid company in the 1960s.

But there has been only cursory attention paid to the many ghost stories that he penciled for Charlton from the mid-1960s through the 1970s. Centering on the years 1969-1974, when he devoted his time almost exclusively to Charlton (his last mainstream work appeared in the final issue of *Beware The Creeper* for DC in 1969; his own characters appeared in low-circulation fanzines) Ditko produced many of his most interesting artistic efforts, enlivened by the freedom to experiment with design, pacing and storytelling (usually with Joe Gill, one of the company's most prolific writers).

Ditko had never truly left Charlton, continuing to pencil issues of *Gorgo* and *Konga* until 1963, and one issue of *Return of Gorgo* in 1964, while devoting the majority of his time to Marvel. In late 1965 he began penciling *Captain Atom* while completing his final Dr. Strange and Spider-Man stories for Stan Lee. At Charlton, although the pay was low, work was steady and he was allowed to dabble extensively with his craft. His first work in the mystery genre began with *Ghostly Tales* #55 (cover-dated May 1966). Initially he was teamed with inker Rocke Mastroserio, but Ditko soon found time to ink his own pencils. It was not unusual to see him represented in the majority of Charlton's mystery output, churning out several short stories a month. He had experience with this material for Charlton in the 1950s on *The Thing!*, *This Magazine is Haunted*, *Strange Suspense Stories* and *Tales of the Mysterious Traveler*, as well as for Atlas in their 5-page vignettes in the back of *Strange Tales*, *Tales To Astonish*, *Journey into Mystery* and *Amazing Adult Fantasy*. Detailed below are a selection of stories that Ditko produced for Charlton Comics circa 1969-1974 that I feel have been overlooked and are worth seeking out.

Note: Most stories are believed to be written by Joe Gill unless otherwise noted.

1969

GHOSTLY TALES

Ditko got off to a strong start in *Ghostly Tales* #71 with "The Eternal Oak," a tale about an American Indian murdered for a crime he did not commit. The dying native curses the man who shot him, and all his descendants. Ditko specialized in being able to work on different time periods, and his depiction of clothing and scenery gave the story an air of authenticity. The host of this book was Mr. L. Dedd, a pale, red headed, caped character who narrated each story. While EC Comics was noted for their wise-cracking hosts in the 1950s, and countless other companies employed them (an idea that was copied from radio shows such as *Inner Sanctum*), before Ditko they were used almost solely to open and close the story and narrate. Ditko is perhaps the first person to use them throughout the book (something he began doing in the 1950s on books such as *Tales of the*

Mysterious Traveler--itself an adaptation of a radio program--and *This Magazine is Haunted*) between panels and in the stories themselves at times. While little noted, it added a distinct personality to the books and gave the mystery titles a uniformity. Throughout the tale Ditko's thin pencil line, excellent pacing and use of mood were superior. (This was the first Charlton Comic I remember seeing, in a barber shop; in the back of my mind I realized that the artwork was familiar.) "Loser's Weepers"(#73) is memorable for Ditko's use of humor in a tale focusing on a hen-pecked husband. In "Rydan's Folly" (#76) a ghost seeks to make up for past crimes, and Ditko used varied camera angles, facial expressions and close ups to evoke suspense.

MANY GHOSTS OF DR. GRAVES

Dr. Graves was a human host who investigated occult phenomena, and occasionally participated in adventures. One of his most interesting tales was in #11's "The Ultimate Evil" (scripted by Steve Skeates) as Graves is called on to battle an other-dimensional villain who is intent on the destruction of the earth. There are many parallels to Doctor Strange in this story, and author Skeates makes it obvious in references to NY's Greenwich Village and to the astral plane. Ditko does his part too, as Dr. Graves is shown to have mystical abilities (and hand gestures!) reminiscent of Doctor Strange. The story features a number of tricky twists, and ultimately the earth is destroyed, forcing Graves to go back in time to save it. There are several panels of Graves walking through empty white space, a visual device Ditko used a number of times in his books (look for similar scenes in the recent movie *The Matrix*; the producers are confessed comic book fans). "Return to Trilby Shoals" (#16) centers on a man and woman trapped at sea and ghostly retribution; Ditko's manipulation of swirling fog and shading evoked an aura of menace. The same issue featured "The Hanged Man," depicting a war criminal who pays for his past indiscretions. Again, Ditko experimented with inventive panels, such as reflecting the hangman's noose in the killer's eye.

Dr. Graves as a Master of the Mystic arts, hot on the heels of the ground-breaking Ditko work on Marvel's Dr. Strange; in The Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves #11 (Feb 69)

"THE ULTIMATE EVIL"
THERE IS NOTHING HERE...IN ANY OF THESE TEXTS! NOTHING ON HOW TO WEAKEN ONE'S OWN SPIRIT!
BUT I'VE HEARD THAT SOMEWHERE IN THE LAND OF ENDLESS VOIDS-THERE EXISTS POWER SAPPING BEINGS! PERHAPS IF I GO TO THIS WORLD AND ALLOW THEM TO SAP SOME OF MY POWER I WILL BECOME WEAK ENOUGH.
INSTANTLY, GRAVES PROJECTS A MYSTICAL DOORWAY, WHICH WILL TAKE HIM TO THE DREAD LAND OF ENDLESS VOIDS...
AND SECONDS LATER
NOW I KNOW WHY THEY CALL THIS THE LAND OF ENDLESS VOIDS. THERE SEEMS TO BE NOTHING HERE!

SPACE ADVENTURES

While the bulk of Ditko's work was in the mystery genre, he was versatile enough to produce other types too, such as science-fiction. He penciled three stories for this title in 1969. The first, "Magnet of Magento" (#5), related a tale of an alien invasion in earth's future. While the story was standard fare, Ditko manipulated the layouts, using many vertical and horizontal panels. "Planet X" (#6) gave Ditko a chance to illustrate a Flash Gordon-style hero (a character it has been said he would have liked to draw) in a *Twilight Zone*-styled tale of a living planet seeking companionship. "It's a Small World" (#8) employed odd slanted panels (inspired perhaps by Neal Adams, who was working in a similar style at the time) as a space commander encounters two aliens, a sinister figure who miniaturizes him, and a female who aids and falls in love with him.

JUNGLE JIM

These were the only Ditko stories he did not ink himself in 1969. "The Wizard of Dark Mountain" (#22; inked by Wally Wood with help from his assistants), concerns an oriental villain in the Ming the Merciless tradition bent on world conquest. The same team (more or less) returned in #27 with three tales involving giant reptiles, scientists, talking tigers and winged men. They sound more exciting than they are and the art is shaky in places, but any Ditko/Wood collaborations are worth pursuing.

1970

GHOST MANOR

#13 introduced a host, Winnie the Witch, the creation of Joe Gill and Steve Ditko, whose mod design (blue skin, long black hair, shades, a purple cape and a white mini-skirt) was attractive and stood apart from the more reserved or sinister hosts of the other titles. Aside from an excellent cover (#15) Ditko did his usual job of illustrating angry ghosts, possession and his stereotypical (if amusing) hippies.

GHOSTLY TALES

This title presented many entertaining stories, including "Which Witch" (#79), occurring in both the present and a flashback to the 17th Century (Ditko appears to have enjoyed illustrating this time period, a perennial in many stories) wherein a young woman seeks retribution for an ancestor accused of witchcraft. Ditko also utilized a cat in the story, another "character" that he frequently depicted in a positive light (Ditko may like cats as individuals, independent and with a free will -- or maybe I'm stretching his libertarian beliefs a little far). "The Treasure of the Swamp" (#80) has a geologist accompanied by a guide searching for oil in the swamps. The apparently simple-minded guide has certain powers and persuades the geologist to leave the natural beauty of the swamp alone. Ditko brings the swamp surroundings to life with detailed rendering of rotted trees, overflowing vines and reptiles. "The Third Grave" (#81) relates a tale of three men in the early 20th Century who form a business partnership. Because two of the men distrust each other, they allow the third, Everett Harcutt, to assume the position of chairman. He slowly makes the two suspicious of each other, ending in a fatal duel. The dying men discover that Everett had planned their demise and they place a curse on him to live forever, but forced to face all the infirmities that come with it. A fine story, capped by Ditko's superior use of expressions and emotions on the characters' faces. Finally, "The Work of Genius" (#83) has Ditko transporting us to 19th Century England (another favorite locale) as a hack artist has an apprentice paint the portraits he is commissioned to do. Ditko portrayed a sadistic character in a well-told story.

THE MANY GHOSTS OF DR. GRAVES

"An Ancient Wrong" (#20) opens with an exceptionally detailed splash page set in a London museum, as an obsessed lord seeks out the Goddess of Love and gets more than he bargained for. It has inventive storytelling and detailed inking, bringing weight to the statues, and creative use of Dr. Graves, employing the character as a kind of "gutter" between panels, an experimental technique that added up to a superior entry. "The Lost Dutchman's Mine" (#21), takes place in the West, a tale of greed and gold concerning an American Indian who places a curse that destroys anyone who tries to steal his gold. Another fine rendering job, with Dr. Graves' expressive features used throughout.

Ghost Manor #15 (Nov 70); the next year the title would be changed to Ghostly Haunts and a new Ghost Manor would begin with a #1 issue

"Verdict from the Grave" (#22) takes place in a Balkan village; a beautiful young woman and her great-grandmother (whose aged features give her personality) return to clear the name of the great-grandmother, who had been accused of witchcraft decades ago. The granddaughter finds the true witch and her great-grandmother is avenged. Although similarities to "Which Witch" abound (a young woman, witchcraft, and -- of course -- a cat) Ditko's ornate pencils, evocative inks and sheer command of the form make this one of the better entries in the genre.

A dramatic, thematic detail from the cover of Ghostly Tales #89 (Oct 71); see the entire cover in the Color Gallery (and note the misspelling in the cover blurb, "Mr. Eye" became "Mr. Ever"--a less than fatal error!)

JUNGLE JIM /PHANTOM

Ditko pencils three interesting jungle tales that do not involve the books' headliners. "Big Man With a Gun" (*Jungle Jim* #28) relates the story of a conceited big game hunter receiving his comeuppance. "The Promise of Akra-Shi" (*Phantom* #36) involves an American geologist on the run from Egyptians who encounters an ancient justice. "Peace Brother" (Phantom #39) concerns a Peace Corp officer in Africa involved in a skirmish with brigands who try to pillage the land. The black characters are portrayed as heroic and resourceful, and while devoid of any messages the images of the characters, black and white, working together was a positive one. All three stories are concise at four pages each, but hold together nevertheless.

FIGHTIN' ARMY

Ditko drew three short stories in this series (#s 89-91), which took place in World War II France, Red China and Japan. While none of the stories had the dramatic impact that many of his mystery tales achieved, Ditko showed his versatility by performing in "foreign" territory.

OUTLAWS OF THE WEST/ TEXAS RANGERS IN ACTION

Speaking of foreign territory, Ditko saddled up to pencil three western tales, none of which could be called his most distinguished work. *Outlaws of the West* featured two Ditko stories (#'s 80-81), the latter one of his better entries, involving a prospector and his quest for gold. He picks up a man in the desert who intends to steal the gold for himself. A good tale due to the focus on the two characters. The Ditko in *Texas Rangers in Action* #77 involved Mexican bandits terrorizing a village protected by a Texas Ranger. Aside from Ditko's usual flair for faces, westerns were more an oddity for this artist than any other genre.

1971

GHOSTLY TALES

A stunning cover opens "Luka's Evil Eye" (#84), the tale of Gypsy Andre Luka who, possessed by an evil eye acquired by a pact with the devil, terrorizes the authorities who lock him up. His fellow Gypsies end his evil reign. Nice use of costumes, scenery, attention to detail and use of the title's host. In "The Ninth Life" (#85) the aforesaid host, Mr. Dedd, is absent from the proceedings. In this story a man disgusted with his lot in life takes in a cat (!), who turns out to be a witch. Wishing to live in "better times," he is transported into said times and finds out that not all was as idyllic as he believed (reminiscent of the Frank Capra movie *It's a Wonderful Life*), as each age has its tragedies and injustices. He returns to the present determined to make the

best of his life. Ditko was sympathetic to this scenario, as it reeks of his more personal independent stories, but with greater attention to plot. Another positive feature is Ditko's inventive panel arrangements, such as a shot inside a tear-stained eye and symbolic images of good/evil and life/death. "Hide and Eeeeek," in the same issue, is of interest due to the bizarre use of the narrator (Mr. Dedd) as a protagonist in the story. Altering his appearance (from chalk white to skin tone) and disguising him in human form did nothing for the character and it was the last such attempt (at least in a Ditko illustrated story). "Someone Else is Here" (#86) served up newly-weds who take over an estate; the wife hates the husband, who grows depressed with his situation. A female ghost lives in the mansion and falls in love with the man. She inhabits the wife's body and becomes his loving wife. Expressive faces, an attractive woman and Mr. Dedd's pantomime expressions enliven this romantic tale. "Dig this Crazy Pad" (#88) is of note due to the lack of a real menace in the story. Hippies inhabit a cottage that harbor a male and female ghost. The female ghost enjoys the offbeat company and both eventually become human again. For a change the hippies are slightly less stereotyped, and the story is charming. "The Fatal Error" (#89) begins with an effective splash page of a burial in the rain. We flashback to Byron Williams grieving over his recently departed wife. Enter cabaret entertainer Mr. Eye (a character that would look at home in a Gilbert Hernandez comic. Gilbert, along with brother Jamie, is responsible for the alternative comic *Love & Rockets*, and if it seems out of place to mention all this here, I believe its a tribute to Ditko's far-reaching influence) and his beautiful assistant stranded in the woods. Williams offers them shelter, but the evil Mr. Eye hypnotizes the young man to fall in love with the assistant, and prepares to steal his wealth when she marries. Mr. Eye plots to boobytrap Williams car, but he dies in Williams' place. Ditko excelled in designing weird characters, and this was one of his weirdest.

THE MANY GHOSTS OF DR. GRAVES

We'll start with "The 5.99 Special" (#24), as a beautiful Gypsy con artist is arrested by a cop, but she turns out to really have supernatural powers at her command, and the utterly mismatched pair fall in love. This old plot works because the characters have personality and Ditko's compelling page design draws the eye in: he uses swirling globules (such as one would see in a crystal ball) as panels throughout the story, with Dr. Graves as the omniscient host. "The Pharaoh Will Rule Again" (#27) takes us back 4,000 years, as an evil Pharaoh is sentenced to death. In the present an archeologist travels to Egypt with an aide who turns out to be the Pharaoh's High-Priest. The Pharaoh is revived as a mummy and attempts to possess the archeologist's body. The modern age intrudes on his plans as a sonic boom turns the mummy to dust. The Egyptian setting is thoughtfully rendered, one of Ditko's finest. Issue 28 has no interior Ditko stories, but the cover of Dr. Graves holding an ancient parchment is well worth the price of admission.

I HEAR THE KIDS MESSED UP MOONEY AGAIN. SERVES 'M RIGHT
HER DIRTY LAUGH WAS ECHOED ALL OVER TOWN! BY AMOS GRAFFT, THE BANKER. HE CHEATED MR. MOONEY OUT OF A LARGE SUM OF MONEY!
HE THOUGHT HE WAS A SHARP OPERATOR! HEH HEH HEH!
HE CAUGHT ME PADD'N' HIS REPAIR BILL ONCE AND MADE A STINK! I FIXED 'IM NEXT TIME... HE WRECKED THE CAR DRIVIN' HOME AFTER I JIMMIED THE FRONT END! HEH HEH HEH!
IN SHORT, FRENDS... I ALWAYS HAVE TROUBLE WITH THAT WORD ..MR. MOONEY HAS BEEN RIDICULED ASSAULTED, PLUNDERED...AND ROBBED OF HIS RESPECT FOR HIS FELLOW MEN! IN A WORD...HE SEETHES WITH HATRED!
NO, NO!...WE NEED TO LOOK MORE CLOSELY AT MR. MOONEY...
IF I WERE BIG AND POWERFUL.. ..AND VICIOUS...
IF I WERE BIG AND POWERFUL... ..AND VICIOUS...

Great Ditko facial expression, from Ghost Manor #2 (Volume 2, Dec 71, detail)

GHOST MANOR

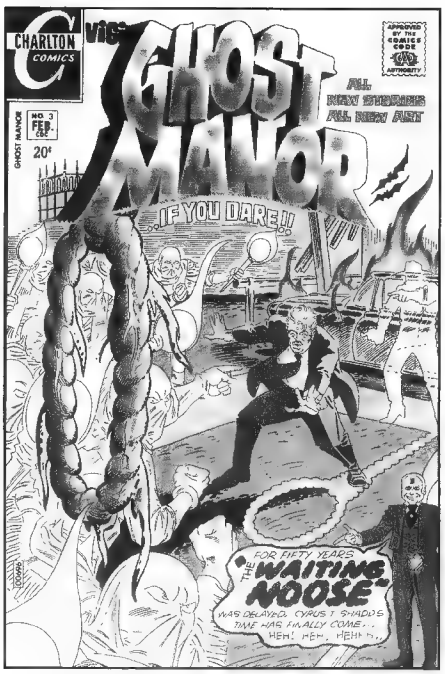
This title has unusual numbering, as it ended its first run with #19, then was relaunched with a first issue and a new host. The original host (Winnie the Witch) would continue, as would the numbering, in *Ghostly Haunts* the following year. The last issue ended on a high note with

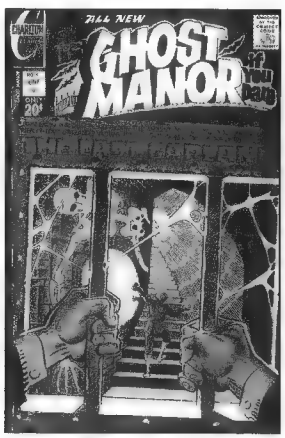
"What She Sees in Him," as a geeky kid (who happens to be a warlock) uses a potion on a beautiful woman to gain her love. His looks change for the better, but it turns out the lady he sought to enchant was a witch. Ditko illustrates the tale with a lighthearted touch. With the new #1, Mr. Bones is introduced, a supernatural butler at a mansion (Ghost Manor, of course). Ditko adds a few in-jokes, with cameo appearances of Mr. Dedd and Winnie the Witch. "It Will Roam Tonight" (#2), begins as a timid man in a small midwestern community is ostracized by the residents. His desire for revenge manifests itself as a creature that he "possesses." Ditko again reveals his superiority in detailing emotions with a particularly strong image of the man's face, bathed in raw, naked hatred.

HAUNTED

The ghost books were clearly selling briskly for Charlton, so they decided to come up with a new one, this time showcasing Ditko's art in the entire book (as Stan Lee had done in *Amazing Adult Fantasy* a decade earlier). A not-too-interesting, diminutive ghost, "Impy," was introduced as host. Ditko produced three tales of revenge, murder and the supernatural. The best of the three, "It's About Tyme," involves an ESP researcher whose female assistant is apparently murdered, and the young man (who was secretly in love with her) is framed for her death. The protagonist (not your typical leading man; he happens to be overweight, with curly hair and glasses) turns out to have extra-sensory powers and the true culprit emerges in an image that is seen through him. The woman revives, reveals her mutual feelings for her employer, and the unconventional tale ends on a happy note. Unfortunately, after the first issue Ditko would no longer be the sole artist.

Ghost Manor Vol 2, #3 (Feb 72) and #5 (Jun 72)


CHARLTON COMICS
GHOST MANOR
IF YOU DARE!!
ALL NEW STORIES ALL NEW ART
FOR FIFTY YEARS THE WAITING NOOSE
WAS DELAYED. CYRUS T. SHADD'S TIME HAS FINALLY COME... HEH! HEH! HEH!...



I LOVE YOU

Ditko only drew one non-mystery story in 1971, #91's "Night Without Tears," a tale involving a young girl who has feelings for a boy who happens to be her cousin. She soon discovers that they are *distant* cousins and free to love one another. Ditko's storytelling skills were competent, but what is interesting is that Ditko had greater success with romantic plots in a number of ostensible mystery stories.

1972

GHOST MANOR

This title contained some of Ditko's finest stories, beginning with "The Waiting Noose" (#3) as Cyrus T. Shadd returns to a ghost town in the West. We flashback to Shadd as a youth who shoots a man in the back to keep the gold he has found. The townspeople intend to hang him but he dynamites a mine and kills them. In the present the ghosts return to mete out justice. Ditko enlivened the story with a full-page shot of Shadd in fear of the noose. "Come Back to Tlakluk" (#4) begins with a rare double-page montage shot of an aircraft fight between an American and Japanese pilot during World War II. Both men fall into the waters below, and the Japanese soldier saves the American, who resents the fact that he owes his life to an enemy. He leaves the Japanese man for dead, but 20 years later is haunted by his ghost. An unusual tale, with the twist of making the American soldier the villain of the piece. "The Last Garland" (#5) is one of Ditko's most effective covers: the point of view is through a prisoner's eyes, his hands gripping cobwebbed bars,

observing a man climbing up cellar stairs. The beautifully detailed interior involves art thieves in a London museum. The thief locks up his cousin and a female companion in an ancient castle, but a ghostly ancestor takes vengeance on his worthless relative. Ditko's pen work and atmospheric flair is truly exceptional here.

GHOSTLY HAUNTS

The first issue of what was formerly *Ghost Manor* continues with Winnie the Witch as hostess. "The Night of the Lonely Man" (#22) begins in a remote Balkan village, as the residents fear walking the streets on the anniversary of a murder that took place years ago. The ancestor of the murdered victim investigates and ends the curse. Ditko uses shadows throughout to create a feeling of apprehension. "Treasure of the Tomb" (#23) is a delightful tale of a graverobber in London who follows instructions to revive a dead man. This succeeds, but the dead man inhabits the graverobber's body, only to discover that the London he has returned to has changed radically. He is beaten and mugged on the streets and returns to his decaying house, where he is forced to give up the money in his safe. He flees from the modern world back to the peace of the grave. The second tale of the issue, "Return Visit," has two death row convicts, one grinning, the other grim, escaping prison. They return to the house of the man they murdered in search of the money they left behind. They discover a woman in the house who is the ghost of the murdered man's wife, who leads them to their destruction. #25 is distinguished solely due to Ditko's redesign of Winnie the Witch. Her costume was altered with a shorter cape, different hair style and glasses, a green dress and a broom, perhaps to make her look like a traditional witch. Somehow, she didn't seem as enchanting.

GHOSTLY TALES

Ditko penciled many impressive covers in this period, arguably some of his very best, such as #94's featuring a terrified man running in fear from a ferocious wolf, a man's grinning features and form superimposed over the wolf. "Answer the Phone, Dottie" (#95) features a nasty teenage girl's pranks, tormenting a neighbor over the phone. She harasses the wrong woman, one who is really a witch. Ditko depicts a filthy teenager, the kind he obviously despises, this time as a spoiled brat who has parents who treat her well. Aside from the ending, the real life situation makes the story interesting.

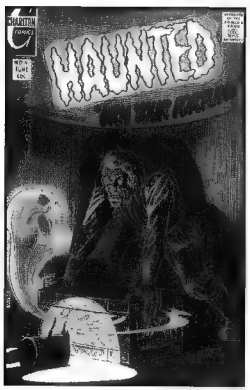
CHARLTON COMICS
ALL NEW STORIES - ALL NEW ART
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
NO. 94 APR. CDC
20¢
GHOSTLY TALES
FROM THE HAUNTED HOUSE
I DARE YOU TO READ!
"THE NIGHT OF THE LAUGHING WOLF!"

Ghostly Tales #94 (Apr 72)

HAUNTED

"Driven to Destruction" (#4) begins with a powerful cover. Inside, a henpecked husband is driven mad by his wife's incessant nagging. His continual attempts to murder his wife backfire, but she eventually dies, returning to haunt her husband, who dies in a car crash. Ditko does exceptional work on the husband's expressions throughout, an extreme hate-filled close-up being a stand out. In "This is How it Is" (#5) a dead man's inheritance is given to his son, who takes over his father's factory from his uncle and turns into a tyrant. The distressed father watches from beyond the grave, wishing to change what has happened (Ditko conveys the father's painful emotions over his son's deeds in a long shot of him sitting on a gravestone). He soon discovers

A classic Ditko page (detail) from Haunted #4 (Mar 72); #6 (Jun 72) cover



that what had happened was only a vision and is given a second chance to right the wrongs. There are no real villains in the story, the father being misguided in his attempts to help his son. An interesting side-note is the son's strong resemblance to an older version of Peter Parker, with a cousin a double for Harry Osborne. "Stop the Clock" (#7), opens with a typical couple stranded on the road. They go to an old house and meet up with a man who appears normal to the couple (but is depicted as a fiend to the reader). The man has old issues of *Colliers* and *Liberty* magazines and listens to the Benny Goodman band and *Lights Out* on the radio (the authentic references give the story a feel of reality). The man's false face reverts to its frightening form in the dark, terrifying the woman (Ditko uses a full page shot of the ghoul stalking the woman, echoing the classic scene of Lon Chaney in his portrayal of The Phantom of the Opera). The ghoul dies before he can cause any harm. A nicely-rendered change-of-pace story.

MANY GHOSTS OF DR. GRAVES

"A Gift for Gifford" (#30) concerns a timid man who buys an idol that transforms him into an aggressive and violent man--until another timid soul takes possession of the idol. Ditko's ability to change the character visually makes the story work. "The Heart of Jeremy Mirth"(#31) involves a dying man who will pay any price to get a healthy heart. He finds a donor in the guise of a warlock who seeks to inhabit his body. The sinister features of the warlock and inventive panel arrangements (designed as index cards) make this story stand out.

1973

GHOST MANOR

Issue 9 begins with a bizarre Ditko cover illustrating the inside story "Tonight, I'll Dream of You." A caterpillar-like creature dreams of a human on a ship, who, when he falls asleep, becomes trapped in the creature's dimension. He is awakened by a thief whom he knocks out. The unconscious villain slumbers unsuspectingly as he enters the creature's dimension and is used as a sacrifice. An odd tale that has Ditko working in a sketchier, less-defined style that does not measure up to the more finely detailed pencils that were representative of his best work. His art fluctuated wildly in this period, with some stories weightier than others, but whether it was a deliberate move or an unconscious change, the stories suffered on occasion. As a side-note, the caterpillar is similar in appearance to its more benevolent brethren that appeared in *Amazing Adult Fantasy* #8. "Reconciliation" (#10) had an enchanting three-panel cover; on the inside a married couple move into an old house haunted by the ghost of a woman who accidentally killed her husband. As a ghost she seeks forgiveness from her husband. This was more of a love story than a ghost tale, and Ditko imbued the character with personality. Issue 1 featured another stunning Ditko cover, but his most impressive outing was the interior tale, "Theft of Evil." In a story set in the Old West, a band of thieves follow an old man who guards a gold mine. His greedy partner is killed by a worm-like menace who feeds on evil but is eventually destroyed by the miner. The creature is similar to another Ditko created for Charlton's horror book, *The Thing!*, in the 1950s. Ditko brought atmosphere to the proceedings, and it was one of his better-illustrated Western stories. "Escape" (#15) was the cover feature (another superior one, with a barbed wire design). In a German prison camp during World War II, POWs plan to escape their sadistic captors. They build an underground tunnel, but have no idea there is a Nazi among them

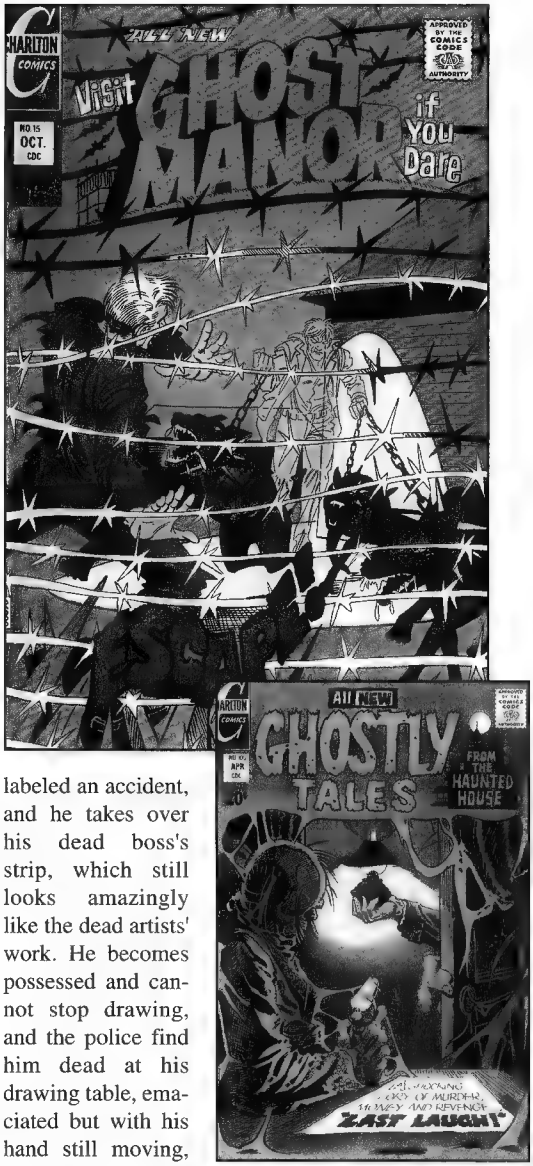
posing as an American. The prisoners eventually turn the tables on their captors, whose own ferocious dogs are turned upon them. Ditko's depiction of the brutal Nazis, and their counterpart Dobermans, cement a strong Joe Gill script.

GHOSTLY HAUNTS

"Partners" (#29), relates a tale of two friends, Max Aaren and Henri Farr, who strike gold in Canada. Both become insane with greed as Henri kills Aaren. He hears his dead partner's voice in the solitude, hides in a cabin in the woods and is eventually driven insane by a ghost. Besides Ditko's usual expressive faces, his experimentation with panel arrangements stands out. Here he uses multiple images in horizontal panels (except for a full page splash where he continues to use the same technique with the camera "eye" moving freely), without the use of borders. The images flow gracefully into each other, with no lack of comprehension by the reader. He used this same style in the following issue, as well as in *The Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves* #s 37 and 38 that same year. It's regrettable that he didn't employ this technique more often, as it was an innovative form of storytelling. "The Shetabi Legend" (#32) concerns a fur-covered creature who is investigated by two Canadian scientists and their American Indian guide. When one of the men is injured, the Shetabi helps the men to survive. It turns out the Shetabi is a lonely female creature, who seeks companionship. This is another rare tale without any real threat, and Ditko effectively employs a number of silent panels.

GHOSTLY TALES

"Ghost Artist" (#101) is arguably one of Ditko's best stories, one that has a decidedly EC-ish flavor. The tale of two comic book artists, one talented, the other a hack, is chronicled by Ditko with more than a little bit of, perhaps, empathy. The older, kinder artist (who bears a resemblance to Gil Kane, who was known to use assistants) shares his space and offers tips to a young protege, but the assistant is only resentful and envious (with facial expressions only Ditko could do). Rejected by a newspaper syndicate (for which the elder artist is drawing a popular strip), he is filled with hate and pushes the senior artist down a flight of stairs to his death. This is labeled an accident, and he takes over his dead boss's strip, which still looks amazingly like the dead artists' work. He becomes possessed and cannot stop drawing, and the police find him dead at his drawing table, emaciated but with his hand still moving, illustrating the murder he committed. A delightful story that Ditko told with great verve. "Last Laugh" (#103), begins with another superb Ditko cover of a cobweb-covered skeleton menacingly clutching a gun, pointing to the door that a man's hands are opening. The tale opens with an old miser taking delight in showing his stepson his great wealth but informing him that he will not inherit it. The stepson has other ideas, poisons



Ghost Manor Vol 2 #15 (Oct 73); Ghostly Tales #103 (Apr 73)

the old man and steals his wealth. As the years pass he wastes it all and is forced to return to the old mansion he fled two decades earlier. The skeleton of the murdered man still holds a gun, which discharges at his stepson as he searches for more money. While not as lush as Ditko's earlier efforts, Ditko's pacing and varied camera angles make this a solid outing. "The Moon Beast" (#106) features a woman who is writing an article for a movie magazine, attempting to interview a reclusive horror star renowned for his portrayal of a werewolf (akin to 1940s horror actor Lon Chaney, Jr). The actor is revealed to have genuine links with the supernatural and has the ability to turn into a real werewolf. A nice little Universal-style horror story. "Happy Ending" (#108) also has a movie motif, this time concerning an eternally youthful actress. It's not plastic surgery but a pact with the devil that keeps her youthful. She returns to the village that she cursed by having it remain unchanged, is deceived by a spell and ages instantly. Another finely rendered tale.

Open panel design and tiered panels, Ditko was second to none in experimenting during the 'Brazen' Age; from The Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves #38 (May 73)

I IMAGINED THIS...
NOTHING IS IN THE ROOM
I'VE GOT TO STOP LETTING MY IMAGINAT.ON RUN WILD!
I'M NOT OVER THE SHOCK OF THEIR DEATHS YET.
THEY ALWAYS SCOLDED ME WHEN I CRIED DURING THE NIGHT... WHEN I PLEADED WITH THEM TO KEEP A LIGHT ON...
I USED TO BE SO FRIGHTENED THEY ALWAYS HELPED DRIVE MY IMAGINARY DEMONS AWAY!
MOM.. DAD... I WISH YOU WERE HERE NOW!
THAT DOOR NEVER DID CLOSE PROPERLY ...IT SWUNG OPEN BY ITSELF...
CRASSHH!
THERE'S GOING TO BE A STORM
I HATE THUNDERSTORMS!

HAUNTED

"A Voice in the Fog" (#14) is another experimental story, as Ditko uses light linework throughout the first five pages to denote fog. A fisherman on his boat hears a voice at sea. When he is picked up no one believes him, but he takes a ship and finds a man in distress on an ice floe. Another unusual tale, which brought a breath of fresh air to the endless stories of ghosts and revenge.

MANY GHOSTS OF DR. GRAVES

"Who's There" (#38) is another Ditko experiment with horizontal panels employing multiple images to tell the story. This interesting tale focuses on a young man alone in a house which he inherited from his recently deceased parents. The ghosts of his parents cause apparitions and let the house burn down so their son can escape his nightmares. The emotions and expressions of the terrified man, as well as his body language, prove once again that Ditko is a master (along with others like Will Eisner) at creating dramatic tension in normal surroundings.

HAUNTED LOVE

Charlton decided to combine two genres that had been selling very well for them: ghosts and romance. "Ding Dong the Witch is Dead" (#4) chronicles a jealous, spiteful, unattractive woman in Salem, who desires a man who has no interest in her. She makes a pact with the devil to make the man love her and becomes pleasing to the eye, but, in the best "be careful of what you wish for" tradition, she discovers her handsome lover to be disagreeable and boring. A different type of story that Ditko handles skillfully. In "Until we Meet Again" (#5) a man swears eternal love to a woman, but is lost at sea. She takes a boat out to the ocean and rescues a man with no memory of his past. Her lover is reincarnated as the man whose life she saved. Ditko rendered the seashore settings with substantial moodiness.

E-MAN

Ditko began doing back-ups in this book with #2, and it is notable for being his first fully-scripted job. "Killjoy" is a super-hero patterned in his Mr. A style, although this hero is silent and has a smiling face mask. Ditko plays with a more comic style, perhaps feeling that more entertainment is needed in a mass-produced comic. Whatever the case, "Killjoy" is populated with weird characters, plenty of panels and no real plot.

1974

This was to be Ditko's last year of solo service for Charlton, and it was an erratic one, characterized by a very loose style, and fewer stories (18). Also, newer writers came aboard and most of them did not have the technical expertise of

Joe Gill. There are exceptions to the rule, however, and below are the highlights:

GHOSTLY TALES

"The Third Victim" (#109) had a *Twilight Zone* feel to it, as a second-string entertainer forces a brilliant craftsman who produces wooden ventriloquist dummies to make one for him at gunpoint. The thief kills the old man and steals the dummy, but soon discovers that it can speak for itself and controls him, as the woodcarver's spirit lives on through his creation. Ditko provided one of the better art jobs of the year and he played with the expressions of the dummy and the thief to great effect. "Make my Dreams Come True" (#111) is an interesting tale of a voodoo woman who wishes her husband gone and gets what she asked for. She marries her lover who turns out to be a sadistic fiend. Ditko did a good job on both the characters and the locale.

E-MAN

Ditko penciled two back-up stories (#4 and 5), one featuring his character Killjoy, with more Ditko philosophy coupled with abstract characters, overly wordy dialogue and plenty of crowded panels. "Liberty Belle" was a rare attempt at a female super-hero, one with a patriotic flavor. While her red, white and blue costume was attractive, and Ditko's art was strong, the plot of opposing the infiltration of a U.S. space station by Communists was sadly outdated. The last panel informed the reader that this pilot story might continue in its own book if reader interest warranted. It did not.

GHOST MANOR

We close out the year with an inspired tale, scripted by Nick Cuti (one of the better writers at Charlton). "Death in a Darkroom" (#21) concerns a freelance photographer who inadvertently takes a photo of a murder at a parade (with cameo appearances of E-Man--the Nick Cuti-Joe Staton creation from the book of the same title--as well as Captain Atom and the Blue Beetle, if you look close enough). He discovers that his camera takes photos of the future and he is the murderer of his nagging wife. At the end he asks himself: "Why did it take so long?" The technical aspects of photography were played up and Ditko's art complimented the story.

By 1975 Ditko would augment his income by penciling for other companies. He produced fine work on the Sword and Sorcery series *Stalker* for DC Comics and returned to super-heroes with *The Destructor* for the short-lived Atlas comics, both in collaboration with the great Wally Wood. He usually chose not to ink his stories for the big companies, leaving his pencils open to interpretation (for good or ill), but he would continue to contribute a finished product for Charlton, cranking out short stories for the company on and off for the rest of its sporadic existence (Charlton would stop publication a number of times, with reprints filling out its later years). His last new work appeared in 1985 (their final year) with a revised version of his own copyrighted character, Static. For over 30 years, Steve Ditko produced some of his most unusual, inventive and offbeat work, appropriately enough, in the back alleys of a small, half-forgotten company; one that, like the corner candy stores that sold their product, was soon to become an anachronism.

A Ditko cat, Ditko sweater-vested 'hero' and Ditko slouch-hatted menace, all on one page from Ghost Manor Vol 2 #2 (Dec 7), detail

DITKO/CHARLTON CHECKLIST: 1969-1974

1969
Ghostly Tales #71-73, 75-77
Jungle Jim #22, 27
Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves #11-13, 15-17
Space Adventures # 5, 6, 8

1970
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Ghostly Haunts #22-25, 26 (cover), 27-28
Ghostly Tales #92, 93-94 (covers), 95, 96 (cover), 97, 99,100
Haunted #3-5, 6 (cover), 7-8
Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves #30-35

1973
E-Man #2
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Ghostly Haunts #29, 30 (cover), 31-34, 36
Ghostly Tales #101-108
Haunted #11-15
Haunted Love #4-5
Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves #37-38, 40-43

1974
E-Man #4-5 Ghost Manor #17-18, 20-21
Ghostly Haunts #37-40
Ghostly Tales #109-112
Haunted #16, 18
Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves #47-48

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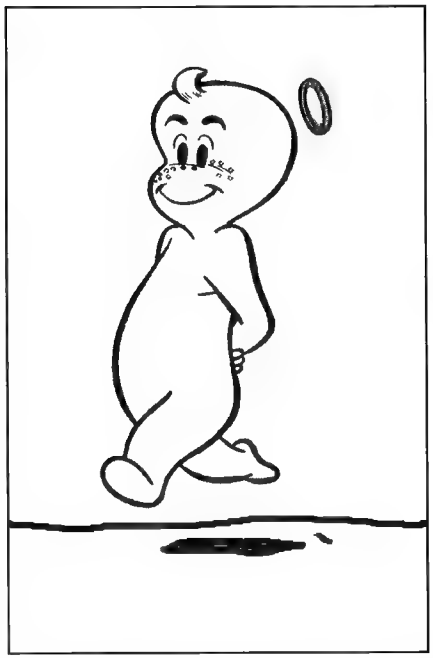
by Rolf Brown

Most collectors think Homer the Happy Ghost is just another Casper rip-off, but dedicated Atlas fans disagree!



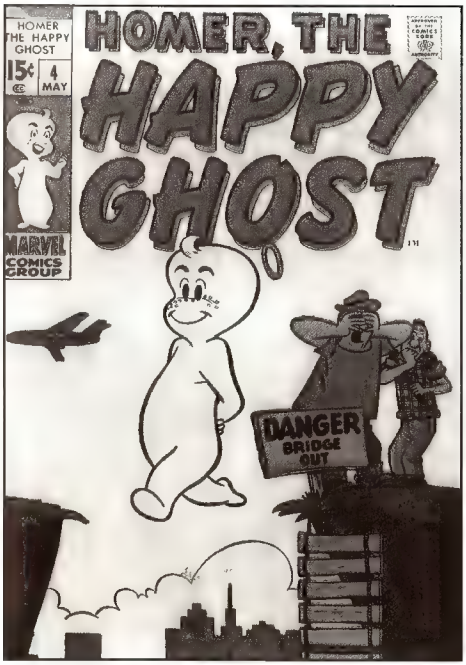
The idea wasn't very original... perhaps even a blatant rip-off, but the mid-fifties collaboration of Stan Lee stories and Dan DeCarlo pencils entitled *Homer, the Happy Ghost* made for a fun, interesting, and often quite clever contribution to the stable of Atlas humor titles. Homer hit the stands in March 1955, almost six years after *Casper, The Friendly Ghost* debuted for St. John Publishing in September of '49... and more than two years after Harvey began publishing *Casper*.

Atlas had not been alone when it jumped on the "Ghost" title bandwagon. St. John/Fago had produced four issues of *Li'l Ghost* in 1958-59, Charlton (never one to miss a subgenre either) produced *Timmy the Timid Ghost* in two iterations which appeared sporadically from 1956 until 1986 (when Charlton itself... er... "gave up the ghost").

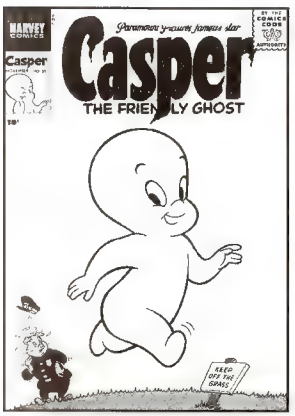
Homer the Happy Ghost appeared in 24 original issues in the 1950s and four Marvel reprints from 1969-70. The initial series ran for 22 issues from March, 1955 through November, 1958. Additionally, Atlas published two issues entitled *Adventures of Homer Ghost* in 1957. These issues were not drawn by DeCarlo however, although Stan Lee received writing credit for this short-lived effort. These two 1957 books belonged to a whole slew of one- and two-shot series Atlas pumped out in 1957, many of which are fairly difficult to find. Collectors of Esoteric books have been avidly locating issues for years (and at dirt cheap prices) while serious Atlas aficionados seek them out as completeists.

Even the later reprint issues are tough to find... the 1969-70 *Homer the Happy Ghost* reprints are right up there with *Groovy* and *Night Nurse* on the obscure Marvel titles index. Until recently, even the *Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* listed a fifth issue for this title. (After a couple of years of looking I was beginning to believe this was a real rarity, when to my relief the Guide was revised.)

The original series of *Homer the Happy Ghost* is no more or less difficult to find than other Atlas runs of the same period, with issues 1-14 seeming to turn up more often than issues 15-22. Gerber lists the entire run with a scarcity of four with the exception of issue #3 which Gerber lists as a 5. I think this is an accurate assessment. On the other hand, the non-DeCarlo *Adventures of Homer Ghost* are more difficult to find... just like most of the Atlas one- and two-shots published in 1957. Gerber gives these two issues a scarcity rating of 5 and 4 respectively. My experience suggests they are closer to 6.



Who ripped whom? Homer first 'beat the sign' by levitating in November 1955 (compare this 60s reprint with the original in the Color Gallery), Casper did the same trick but one year later!



While writer Stan Lee's fame needs little amplification, the genius of comics artist Dan DeCarlo during this "pre-Archie" period is often overlooked by historians and hobbyists alike. Although his best known work was published after he left Atlas in the late fifties and moved to Archie, DeCarlo's work in *Millie the Model*, *Sherry the Showgirl*, *My Friend Irma*, and *My Girl Pearl* contain some of the best good girl art published in the decade. In fact, I would put DeCarlo's work in the same category as that of Baker, Ward and Kamen. Stylistically softer than many of his "good-girl" contemporaries, DeCarlo's art was not as overtly sexual as Ward's or as lurid as that of Baker and Kamen... and never, ever violent. DeCarlo used humor (and a very pretty female shape or two) to grab the reader's attention. While not exactly politically correct by today's standards, the puns, plays-on-words, sight gags and "dumb blonde" jokes are still humorous even today.

Homer was something of a departure for DeCarlo, but nowhere near as extreme as Bill Everett moving between war and action books and a Marvin Mouse one-shot or the different genres Joe Maneely switched between. If quality of the art and stories is any indication Dan and Stan enjoyed producing this title.

Homer the Ghost had a number of characters. Homer would appear in the first story but not necessarily in the others. Issue 1 begins with Homer and his family moving into a new home, which is a well-padlocked abandoned house. Homer, with a limited command of ghost skills, is unsure how to enter the new dwelling, and he has to be shown he can pass through solid materials.

The rest of the cast resides in the new neighborhood and are quickly introduced. Dugan is a bully; Melvin is not very bright; and Invisible Irwin, who was made invisible by the final cast member, Zelda (a forgetful witch who has forgotten how to reverse the spell). In a later issue Annie, Homer's girlfriend, and Gobby, a mischievous goblin, are introduced. Throughout the title humans mistake the cast for kids wearing sheets or they scare the humans away and wonder if they've forgotten to brush their teeth. The actual physical properties of Homer's world are unevenly defined and applied. In one story, Melvin's intangibility causes a policeman to flee in terror. A few pages later Homer lashes him to a mast and uses him as a sail and has to untie him when the boat sinks!

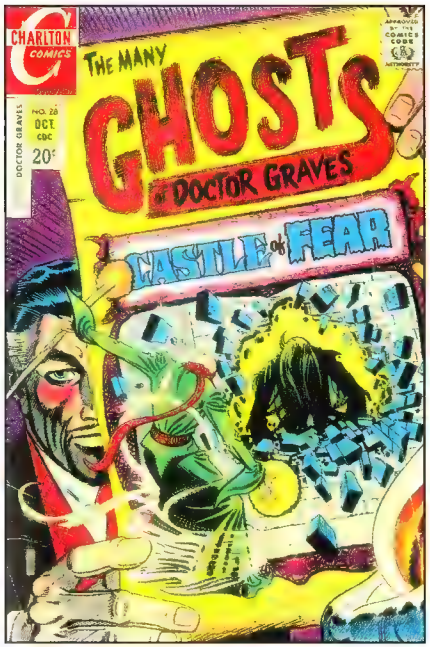
In the *Homer the Happy Ghost* series the popular trends of the 1950s are well reflected as well. In issue 6, Melvin shows up in a new Davy Crockett coonskin cap reflecting the Disney-inspired craze of the time. In issues 11 and 14, Disney characters Mickey Mouse and Goofy appear on the TV Melvin is watching. And in issue 14, there is a flying saucer story that includes an atom bomb explosion.

One of my favorite stories is in issue 19 (May 1958) which has Homer and Dugan flying as high as they can and reaching the satellite Noodnik. It is a pretty clear reference to Sputnik which was launched by the Soviet Union the year before. The Russians see Homer and Dugan, declare it a capitalist plot and try and shoot Homer down.

Other stories include dinosaurs, aliens, robots and fairy tale characters. The coonskin cap story in issue 6 continues into a decidedly politically incorrect encounter with a local Native American tribe. In issue 10, Homer goes to a jungle to hunt beaver and runs into cannibals, who are portrayed in a manner that would

(continued after Color Gallery)

COLOR GALLERY



Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves #28 (Oct 71)

Ghostly Tales #89 (Oct 71)

Haunted #2 (Nov 71)

Ghostly Haunts #23 (Mar 72)

COLOR GALLERY

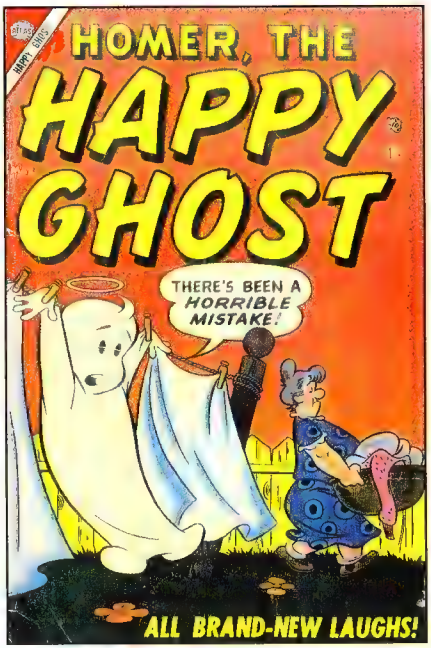
Homer, the Happy Ghost:

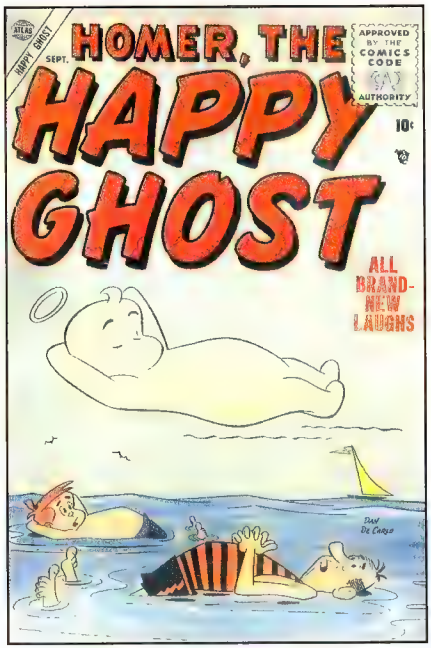
V1#1 (Mar 55)

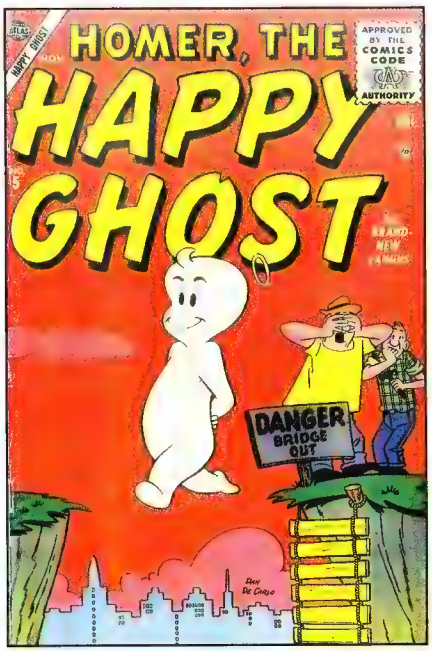
V1#4 (Sep 55)

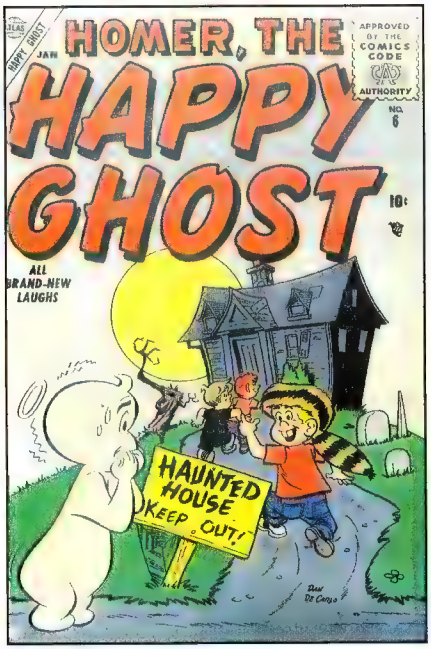
V1#5 (Nov 55)

V1#6 (Jan 56)



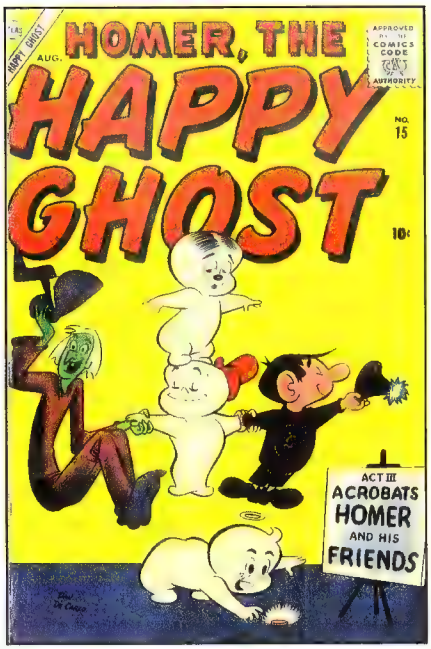




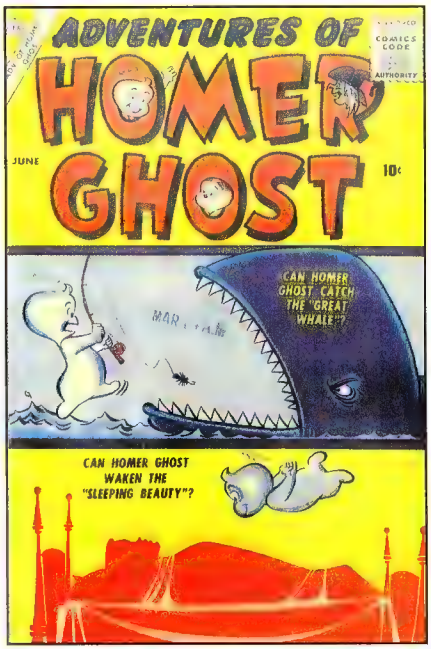


COLOR GALLERY

Homer, the Happy Ghost V1#14 (May 57)



Homer, the Happy Ghost V1#15 (Aug 57)



Adventures of Homer Ghost #1 (Jun 57)

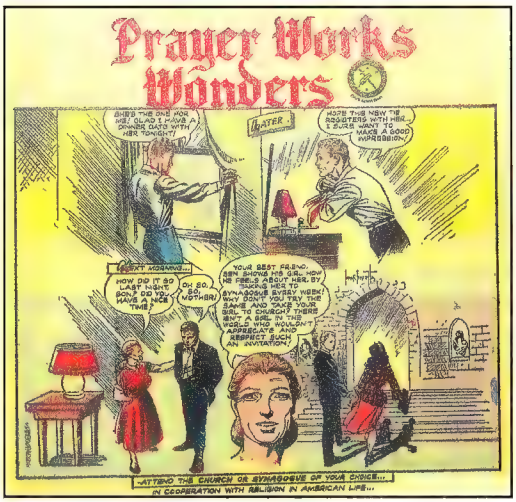
Adventures of Homer Ghost #2 (Aug 57)

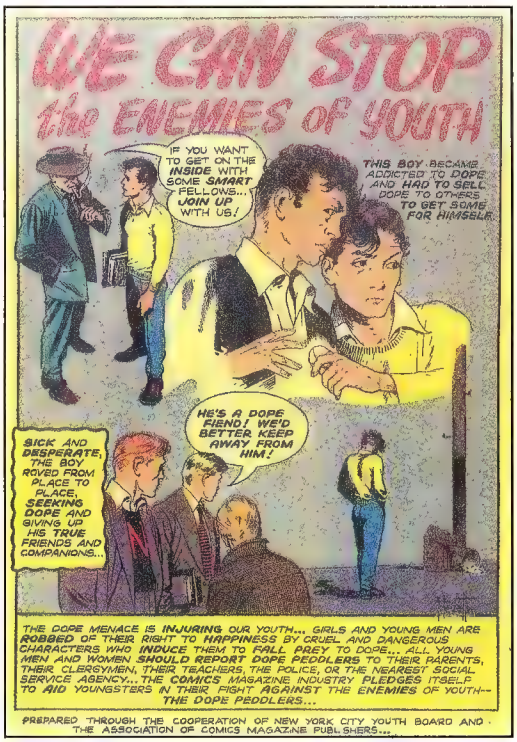
COLOR GALLERY

On the three following Gallery pages are selections from the John Romita era of Spider-Man, and then one page of first issues of titles featuring the Web-Crawler

Frazetta art on public service ads ran in various early fifties Eastern Color, Lev Gleason and Famous Funnies comics (note the inset of Buster Crabbe in the "Red Cross" ad)

RED CROSS NEW METHOD OF ARTIFICIAL RESPIRATION
Washington, D.C.: correct positions for the back pressure -arm lift method of artificial respiration, recently adopted by the American National Red Cross upon recommendation of the National Research Council, are here illustrated by Buster Crabbe. In this method the victim is placed prone with the elbows bent and with one hand upon the other. The cheek is placed on the hand with the face turned slightly to one side. The operator kneels on one knee at the head of the victim
TO START THE CYCLE, I PLACE MY HANDS ON THE VICTIM'S BACK SO THAT MY THUMBS JUST TOUCH AND THE HEELS OF MY HANDS ARE JUST BELOW A LINE RUNNING BETWEEN THE ARM PITS!
I THEN ROCK FORWARD SLOWLY, KEEPING MY ELBOWS STRAIGHT, UNTIL MY ARMS ARE APPROXIMATELY VERTICAL, EXERTING STEADY PRESSURE UPON THE CHEST.
NEXT, I ROCK BACKWARD, SLOWLY SLIDING MY HANDS TO THE VICTIM'S ARMS JUST ABOVE THE ELBOWS!
CONTINUING TO ROCK BACKWARD, I RAISE THE ARMS UNTIL RESISTANCE AND TENSION ARE FELT AT THE VICTIM'S SHOULDER! THEN I DROP THE ARMS AND THUS COMPLETE A FULL CYCLE!
The cycles are repeated twelve times per minute, the expansion and compression phases being of equal length, and the release periods of minimum duration.


Prayer Works Wonders
LATER
SHE'S THE ONE HOW NICE! GLAD I HAVE A DINNER DATE WITH HER TONIGHT!
HOPE THIS NEW TIE SUITS HIS GIRL. I'LL WANT TO MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION!
NEXT MORNING...
HOW DID IT GO LAST NIGHT SON? DID YOU HAVE A NICE TIME?
OH SO, SO, MOTHER!
YOUR BEST FRIEND, BEN SHOWS HIS GIRL HOW HE FEELS ABOUT HER, BY TAKING HER TO GYMAGOGUE EVERY WEEK! WHY DON'T YOU TRY THE SAME THING TONIGHT? THERE WON'T A GIRL IN THE WORLD WHO WOULDN'T APPRECIATE AND RESPECT SUCH AN INVITATION!
ATTEND THE CHURCH OR SYNAGOGUE OF YOUR CHOICE...
IN COOPERATION WITH RELIGION IN AMERICAN LIFE...


WE CAN STOP the ENEMIES OF YOUTH
IF YOU WANT TO GET ON THE INSIDE WITH SOME SMART FELLOWS... JOIN US WITH US!
THIS BOY BECAME ADDICTED TO DOPE AND HAD TO SELL DOPE TO OTHERS TO GET SOME FOR HIMSELF
HE'S A DOPE FIEND! WE'D BETTER KEEP AWAY FROM HIM!
SICK AND DESPERATE, THE BOY ROVED FROM PLACE TO PLACE, SEEKING DOPE AND GIVING UP HIS TRUE FRIENDS AND COMPANIONS...
THE DOPE MENACE IS INJURING OUR YOUTH... GIRLS AND YOUNG MEN ARE ROBBED OF THEIR RIGHT TO HAPPINESS BY CRUEL AND DANGEROUS CHARACTERS WHO INDUCE THEM TO FALL PREY TO DOPE... ALL YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN SHOULD REPORT DOPE PEDDLERS TO THEIR PARENTS, THEIR CLERGYMEN, THEIR TEACHERS, THE POLICE, OR THE NEAREST SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCY... THE COMICS MAGAZINE INDUSTRY PLEDGES ITSELF TO AID YOUNGSTERS IN THEIR FIGHT AGAINST THE ENEMIES OF YOUTH-- THE DOPE PEDDLERS...
PREPARED THROUGH THE COOPERATION OF NEW YORK CITY YOUTH BOARD AND THE ASSOCIATION OF COMICS MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS...

the AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
39
AUG
12¢
SPIDEY and the GREEN GOBLIN... BOTH UNMASKED!

the AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
12¢
41
OCT
THE HORNS OF THE RHINO!

the AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
12¢
42
NOV
THE BIRTH OF A SUPER-HERO!

the AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
12¢
43
DEC
RHINO ON THE RAMPAGE!

the AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
12¢
44
JAN
WHERE CRAWLS THE LIZARD!

the AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
12¢
45
FEB
ONE OF THE WILDEST OF ALL SPIDEY'S BATTLES!
"SPIDEY SMASHES OUT!"

the AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
12¢
47
APR
WOULD'JA BELIEVE--- KRAVEN THE HUNTER!

the AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
12¢
48
MAY
THE VULTURE'S BACK SPIDEY'S GOT'IM!

the AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
12¢
51
AUG
"IN THE CLUTCHES OF... The KINGPIN!"

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
"TO DIE A HERO!"
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
12¢ 52 SEPT

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
12¢ 55 DEC
DOC OCK WINS!

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
DAILY BUGLE
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
2¢ 56 JAN
SPIDEY JOINS DOC OCK!
SUPER-HERO TURNS BAD!
IS THIS THE WRAP-UP — OR SPIDEY'S FINAL
DISASTER!

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
12¢ 60 MAY
O, BITTER VICTORY!

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
WINGS IN THE NIGHT!
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
12¢ 63 AUG

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
12¢ 64 SEPT
THE VULTURE'S PREY!

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
12¢ 65 OCT
ESCAPE IMPOSSIBLE!

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
12¢ 66 NOV
THE MADNESS OF MYSTERIO!

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
2¢ 69 FEB
MISSION: CRUSH THE KINGPIN!

the AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
SPIDER-MAN WANTED!
MARVEL COMICS GROUP

the AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
ROCKED BY THE SHOCKER!
MARVEL COMICS GROUP

the AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
DEATH WITHOUT WARNING!
MARVEL COMICS GROUP

the AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
IN THE BLAZE OF BATTLE!
MARVEL COMICS GROUP

the AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
ON THE TRAIL OF... CHAMELEON!
MARVEL COMICS GROUP

the AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
THE KINGPIN STRIKES BACK!
MARVEL COMICS GROUP

the AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
I HAD TO TELL YOU! I CAN'T KEEP A SECRET ANYMORE!
SPIDER-MAN'S CAREER IS OVER!
I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO COULD KNOW THAT BECAUSE I AM SPIDER-MAN!
IT MUST BE THIS ONE!
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
UNMASKED AT LAST!

the AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
DOC OCK LIVES!
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
SPINE-CHILLING BATTLE OF THE MONTH!

the AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
SPIDEY FIGHTS THE GOBLIN-- AND LOTS, LOTS MORE! NUFF SAID!
MARVEL COMICS GROUP

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
2 GREAT FEATURE-LENGTH SPIDER-MAN THRILLERS!
EXTRA! ADDED ATTRACTION! SPIDER-MAN MEETS THE FANTASTIC FOUR AS "the CHAMELEON STRIKES!"

72 BIG PAGES ANNUAL
the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
THE SINISTER SIX!

THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN
"LO...THIS MONSTER!"

MARVEL COMICS GROUP
MARVEL TEAM-UP
SPIDER-MAN AND THE HUMAN TORCH
ALL NEW!
AND NOW... THE SANDMAN!

GIANT-SIZE SUPER-HEROES SPIDER-MAN
MARK MOI MORBIUS.

MARVEL COMICS GROUP
GIANT-SIZE SPIDER-MAN AND DRACULA

KING SIZE ANNUAL!
MARVEL TEAM-UP
SPIDER-MAN AND THE X-MEN
DOUBLE THE ACTION! DOUBLE THE THRILLS!

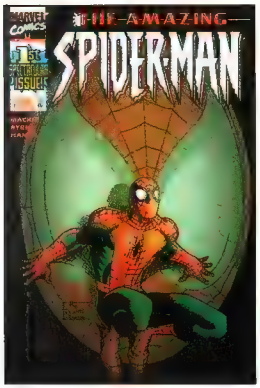
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
PETER PARKER THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN

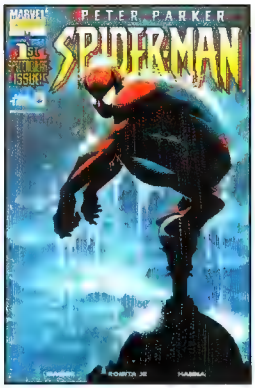
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
KING-SIZE ANNUAL!
PETER PARKER, THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN

WEB OF SPIDER-MAN

ST ALL-NEW COLLECTOR'S ITEM ISSUE!
SPIDER-MAN
TORMENT

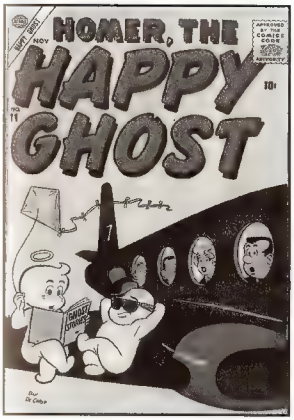
THE SENSATIONAL SPIDER-MAN

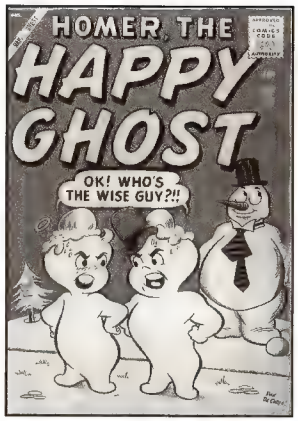

THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
1st SPECTACULAR ISSUE!

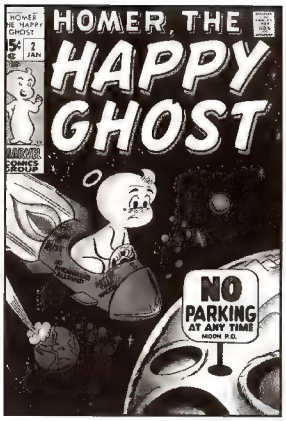

PETER PARKER SPIDER-MAN

MARVEL
ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN

ULTIMATE MARVEL
70 PAGES OF COMICS!
SPIDER-MAN'S 1ST ADVENTURE!
PLUS:
MARVEL MOVIE MANIA!
BLADE'S BLADES!





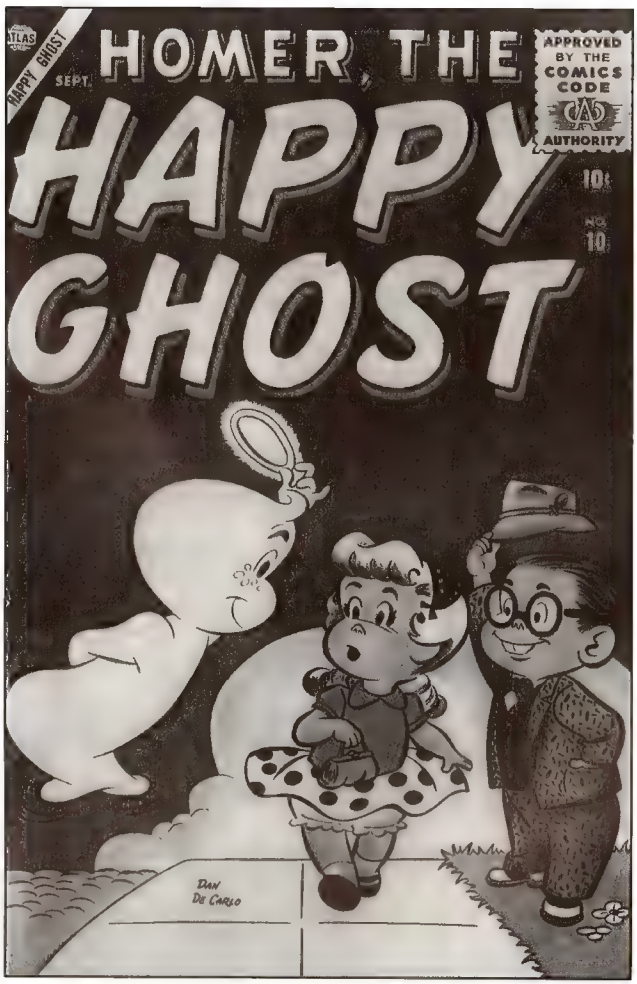


The second-friendliest ghost we know doesn't let the lack of a hat slow him down when flirting with a (bemused) girl, Homer #10 (Sep 56)

Homer, the Happy Ghost #11 (Nov 56), #19 (May 58) and Volume 2 #2 (Jan 1970); exploiting the peculiarities of ghost life, just plain kid stuff and the topics of the day.

not go over well today. These insensitive portrayals of Native Americans and others are just some of the 1950s attitudes evident throughout the title.

For the most part, these stories are light and fun. They are full of sight gags, amusing situations and clever word play. For fans of Dan DeCarlo's work there can be no doubt about his efforts on Homer. Occasionally he puts one of his trademark blondes in a panel such as in the Melvin story in issue 7 or a great Zelda one pager in issue 11. In that issue, Zelda meets two models at a bus stop. The models are complaining about men winking at them, but agree that is the price they pay for being pretty. Zelda states that she is twice as pretty as they are because, "men don't only wink at me, they close both eyes." This little known corner of Dan DeCarlo's career is worth exploring and will reward CBM readers and collectors with an occasional chuckle and an interesting look back at the decade of the 1950s… and all for bargain prices!



JOHN ROMITA SR.

As one of the defining artists of the Marvel Age of Comics and a man who brought romance into Spider-Man's life, John Romita's career stretches from just before the industry's darkest hour to the present day. *CBM* was privileged to chat with "Jazzy" John Romita about his life in comics and that white page that still stares back at him after five decades in the business.

ARNOLD BLUMBERG: *Let's start with your stint as an army illustrator.*

JOHN ROMITA Sr: I was in the Korean War in 1951 and I came out in 1953. I got my induction moved up because a buddy of mine was on Governor's Island and told me they would love to have another artist doing recruiting stuff. After I did my basic training in the infantry, the major who was art director requested me from Fort Dix. I was there for 18 months of my two-year hitch doing recruiting posters and a lot of artwork.

AB: *Was that your first real illustration work?*

ROMITA: The only training I had was a three-year hitch at the School of Industrial Arts right here in NY. When I got out, I did a medical exhibit at the age of 17. I designed and illustrated and even put up the boards on half a floor at a NY City hospital.

AB: *That's quite a debut.*

ROMITA: I was really arrogant at the time [laughs] that I should manage to do it, good or bad. Right after that I worked for two-and-a-half years at a litho house doing Coca-Cola bottles. But back in 1949, a buddy that I had graduated with was inking for Stan Lee. He enticed me into ghost penciling for him, so I was working for Stan months before I ever met him.

AB: *How did the history-making meeting take place?*

ROMITA: The first job I did was actually *Famous Funnies*. The editor of *Famous Funnies* was a philanthropist; he gave a lot of young people their start, and he paid me $200 bucks to do a job that was so bad he never printed it [laughs]. After that I was ghosting with this buddy for Stan, and then I went into the Army. When I finally went up to Stan and told him I was working for him for months but he didn't know me, he gave me a job. We did war stuff, westerns, love stories, science fiction, everything.

AB: *Were you working in an office or at home?*

ROMITA: We all worked at home. I used to work in my bedroom when I first got married. When I got my own little bungalow I worked in the attic, which was very, very cramped. But I worked in that thing for about 10 years and delivered the work into the city, came back with a script and started working again. The only time I ever met anybody in the business was in Stan Lee's waiting room.

AB: *How did you wind up going to DC in 1957?*

ROMITA: Stan cut down to the bone. We went from about 50 titles to about 2 or 3. It was a combination of economics and the fact that comics had run its course at the time. They had started slipping after the war, but they managed to keep going until the Senate investigation [led by Estes Kefauver]. It was devastating to us. I had no idea there would be a comic book industry after that mess. When Stan let me go over to DC to do love stories, I was waiting for the other shoe to drop. I expected every year to be the last year of comics.

AB: *Were you considering other career options?*

ROMITA: When you're young, you're a little bit sluggish. I'm not very aggressive. I have never left a company of my own volition. I've been blessed too, in that whenever I'm in a company, I'm the guy getting work. I was lucky that way, but it also inhibited me from taking the bull by the horns. There were times when Stan was cutting me down during the middle 50s. Every time I went in, I would get a cut in pay, and I just hung on like a bulldog. I left Stan making $24 a page, I went over to DC, and suddenly I was making $38 a page.

AB: I*t sounds like you had the knack of making yourself indispensable.*

THE VERSATILE VIRTUOSO

Interview by Arnold T. Blumberg

ROMITA: My versatility was my biggest asset. I wasn't setting anybody on fire with my talent. I was a journeyman comic artist and I could do anything they wanted, so it kept me working. At one time I thought that may have been a curse because it kept me from being more ambitious. I remember when I made $6000 one year I thought I had conquered the world.

AB: *How did your drawing speed compare with people like Jack Kirby?*

ROMITA: I used to have to work 7 days a week to make a living. The rates weren't very good and I was very slow. Many of my contemporaries were twice as fast as me. When I pencil, I have to think about it too much. I'm a perfectionist. I can work half a day on a page and then tear it up. It kept me back for years, but I was always good enough and just fast enough to get the deadlines. I remember working 30-hour stretches, getting the book in just before the deadline and falling asleep on the train delivering the books. Frankly, I used to yearn for the day that comics would end. I don't know why I stuck with it. In retrospect I must have liked it enough to put myself through the wringer. Guys like John Buscema and Jack Kirby–if they had a thought, they could put it down on paper in a matter of minutes and never second-guess themselves. I always envied and admired them, but I could never speed up. Stan used to offer me bonuses if I could pick up speed. He would tell Kirby or Buscema, 'if you can speed John Romita up, I'll give you a bonus.' He even offered me a bonus once to lose weight [laughs].

AB: *We're approaching a period of your career many remember fondly, your romance stories.*

ROMITA: I only did a few romance books for Stan. Before the crash there and after I came back, we did about a year of romances in the 70s. The eight years I did love stories [for DC] was like Chinese water torture. You didn't have a lot to work with.

AB: *Wasn't it the same story over and over again?*

ROMITA: Yeah, it developed muscles in me that I never had. It gave me an ability to make interesting pages when nothing was happening. I would manufacture ways to make the shots look dramatic, silhouettes and flowing hair. I think it stood me in good stead. When I went back to Stan and started to do *Spider-Man*, I was able to inject that trick and that's how [Peter Parker's] personal life stuff got to be so important. It was already important when Ditko was doing it, but I brought something to it that was unexpected. Stan thought it was a liability that I had worked in romance, but I added some spice.

AB: *Back at DC, had the switch been jarring?*

ROMITA: The only drawback was that I was not working in the mainstream adventures line. I secretly wished that an editor would see me in the hall and say 'how would you like to try Batman?' but they never did. I was very proud to be working for DC and had no urge to go back to Stan. I considered DC the Cadillac of the industry–all the best stuff was done there. They were way ahead, at least in surface quality. What we were unaware of was that it was a little bit bland and lacking in humanity and intensity. But it was such a polished product. They were so clean looking.

AB: *And the pay was better.*

ROMITA: Oh, everything was better. Stan used to call me in the early 60s and say 'please come back.' I used to make $45 a page at the time, which was pretty high believe it or not, but that's for penciling and inking. I would ask Stan 'what do you pay,' and he would say '$25 a page,' and I'd say 'Stan how can I justify taking a $20 a page cut?' I'd say I'd love to do some adventure stuff but I can't afford it. And then finally the romance department at DC came into the same situation that Stan had–a pile of inventory pages. Some executive would walk into a closet, see a pile of inventory, and say 'OK, no more original assignments for a year.'

AB: *They would just shut things down?*

ROMITA: It was an arbitrary decision, cold-blooded. They'd tell everybody 'get the hell out, there'll be no more original stuff. Why should we lay out money when we've got a year's supply of artwork?' Even though it was usually bad stuff. I was out of work. I was going to get out of comics because I felt burned out. This was about 1965, and I remember calling Stan and saying I'd like to come back but I only want to do some inking. I took an inking assignment because I wanted some money coming in. Stan gave me an *Avengers* job penciled by Don Heck, #23 I think. It was a Kirby penciled cover and I enjoyed it, but I told Stan if I'm back in comics it's only as an inker. And he said OK, but of course he didn't keep his promise [laughs].

THREE LIVING, BREATHING MALES TO ONLY ONE GAL, EH?
WHERE HAS THIS PLACE BEEN ALL MY LIFE?
SHE WALKS! SHE TALKS! AND I CAN TELL SHE'S BEEN BUSTIN' TO MEET OL' FLASH!
LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO THE CROWD, M.J.--!
IMAGINE SLY PETE KEEPING HER ALL TO HIMSELF TILL NOW!

AB: *Didn't you pursue other work at this time?*

ROMITA: I didn't think comics had a future anyway. On Thursday afternoon I took a job with an ad agency. On Friday I went in to tell Stan. He took me out to lunch and kept me out for 3 hours [laughs]. He gave me the sales pitch of his lifetime, that I was a natural comic artist, I should be a big fish in a little pond, all of that stuff. He guaranteed me verbally that he'd match the salary even if I didn't turn any work out. I think it was $250 a week, which is much more than I ever made in comics.

AB: *He must have been highly motivated to keep you as part of the team.*

ROMITA: He always considered me his ace in the hole because of my versatility. He knew I could jump from *Captain America* to westerns to war stories. He always felt secure having me there. He used to have another guy there in the 50s, Joe Maneely, who was probably the most versatile guy in the world. He died at the age of 38 in a railroad accident, but he was a genius. When I went to Stan for the first time back in the early 50s, he sent me to Joe to show me some tricks on inking and speed, because Joe was very fast. I went to his studio and I learned more in that one day, especially about inking and how to produce pages, than in all the years I had been in comics. Maneely was like having a stable of artists, he was that fast and versatile. Joe could have handled almost all of Stan's needs all by himself. Between Jack Kirby and Joe Maneely, everybody else would have been out of work. So anyway, Stan was very comforted having me around. I also had a knack of interpreting his needs very well to the point where later on I would do Stan Lee's speech to young artists. That's how I got the Art Director title. I was able to tell them exactly what Stan wanted and save him half a day beating his gums.

AB: *Obviously, Stan steered you back to penciling eventually.*

ROMITA: If I had any sense at all, I would have stayed as an inker, except I would have cut my own throat because it would have messed up the next 25 years of whatever fame I gained in the industry as a penciler. Still I found it a very

hard way to make a living. Jack Kirby could turn out ten pages in the time it took me to turn out three3. Whatever he could think he could draw. Jack used to say he could see the drawing that he wanted on the blank page, and I told him I saw nothing but white. If I close my eyes, I can't visualize anything. I need to start forming stuff on the page with scribbles, and I'm always struggling to find the picture to match what the script calls for. It was like a nightmare. I likened it to pulling out my own intestines.

AB: *So how did Stan steer you into penciling again?*

ROMITA: Dick Ayres tried to pencil *Daredevil* and Stan wasn't happy with it. I showed Stan a quick drawing of how I would handle Daredevil and he loved it. He said 'can you do this for me?' and I said 'gee, Stan it's gonna be very hard for me.' He said 'I'll get Jack Kirby to do a layout job on it.' And for two issues, he got Jack to do a very rough pacing layout, just silhouettes and initials to identify the characters. I could be twice as fast if I had layouts. But I couldn't ask a guy like Jack to spend part of his schedule doing my breakdowns. It was much harder to do it without Jack, but the first 2 issues gave me a good launching. So I did *Daredevil*, and I enjoyed it even though it was hard work. I did about 6 issues of it when Stan sprang *Spider-Man* on me, and truth be told, I was hoping not to do *Spider-Man*. I tried out two issues in *Daredevil* with Spider-Man in it as a start. I never dreamed Steve Ditko would stay away from the book. I thought Ditko would leave for a couple months and then come back. I was rooting for it because I didn't want to give up *Daredevil*. I was starting to enjoy it so much, and to this day he's still my favorite character. I always feel like a guest artist on *Spider-Man*, believe it or not, after 25 years.

AB: *Yours is the definitive Spider-Man for many people.*

ROMITA: With *Daredevil* I felt more in control. I always felt out of control with Spider-Man, like I was ghosting Ditko until maybe a year or two later when I started to be more myself on it. The secondary characters are fun. I made Aunt May my own and I did Mary Jane from scratch, and I changed Gwen. I loved the cast of characters, contrary to people like John Buscema. He broke down *Spider-Man* for about a year, and every issue that we plotted together, John would complain–'I can't stand that old lady!' [laughs] He only did it to help Stan out. It would have been nice if he kept doing breakdowns for me, but he wanted to do *Conan* more than anything else.

I WAS JUST A YOUNG, UNTHINKING TEENAGER WHEN I FIRST BECAME SPIDER-MAN...
BUT, THE YEARS HAVE A WAY OF SLIPPING BY - OF CHANGING THE WORLD ABOUT US...
AND EVERY BOY... SOONER OR LATER... MUST PUT AWAY HIS TOYS... AND BECOME A MAN...

AB: *Much has been made of your romance background leading to a glamorizing of* Spider-Man.

ROMITA: I always envied guys like Kirby and Ditko because they created their own world. When you're in Ditko's story, you're in his world. I'm a little bit more generic. A lot of people used to make fun of it because Ditko did the dented chimneys and smoky scenes, but I tended to be very sanitary–all the roof tops were brand new [laughs]. I used to fight that. One of the ways I got around that was I hired a background man and he made things a little more crude looking. Stan used to constantly harp on me to make Peter Parker less glamorous. I kept telling him I wasn't doing it on purpose, and I kept making [Peter] handsome and it bothered Stan. After a while he said 'Oh the hell with it. Just do it the way you want.'

AB: *How do you perceive your role as a co-creator in relation to others like Kirby and* Ditko?

ROMITA: Everybody had their own personality. I think Ditko and Stan clashed philosophically. Jack and Stan didn't clash, but I used to listen to them plot because Jack and I used to be driven home by Stan. I'd be in the back seat listening to these two giants talking, and the interesting thing is that Jack would go off on a tan-

gent and say 'we could do this,' and Stan would nod his head and say 'but maybe we should do that' and Stan would have his own direction. They used to drop me off first, but at the time I left they were completely at odds. Each one was thinking of their own storyline. I don't think Jack ever adhered to what Stan expected.

AB: *Were you in the office from the time you came back?*

ROMITA: Yeah, that's an interesting thing. Very few guys work in the office, until now with Crossgen in Florida, where they work on the premises. I went in and told Stan I couldn't get the work out at home. I was unable to discipline myself. If I could work in the office I think I could turn in the pages better. Actually it was diminishing returns because I lost so much time traveling in and out, and I was interrupted constantly by Stan's requests that I make changes in other people's artwork or do cover sketches for him. He used me for everything. I worked with Stan first-hand every day. Guys like Buscema, Kirby, Ditko and Colan only spoke to him when they plotted a story.

KINGPIN... LOOK OUT!
HE WAS ONLY PLAYING POSSUM!
TOO LATE! HE FELL FOR IT LIKE A TON OF BRICKS!
WHUUPPFF
OR SHOULD I SAY... A BAG OF BLUBBER!

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN AN EMPTY VICTORY TO DEFEAT A FOE WHO IS HELPLESSLY SHACKLED!
THEREFORE, I'LL SET YOU FREE! I'LL PROVE I'M YOUR MASTER!
YOUR FINAL THOUGHT... BEFORE THE END COMES... WILL BE THAT I GAVE YOU EVERY CHANCE... AND STILL I DEFEATED YOU... UTTERLY AND ETERNALLY!
YOU FAST-TALKING PHONY! YOU KNEW I WAS ABOUT TO BREAK LOOSE ANYWAY! THAT'S WHY THE GRAND-STAND PLAY!
OKAY, PARKER, THIS MAY BE THE MOST FATEFUL FIGHT OF YOUR LIFE! SO DON'T FUMBLE THE BALL, FELLA... THERE'S TOO MUCH AT STAKE!
RAKK!

AB: *Did you already hold the title of Art Director by this time?*

ROMITA: It was an unofficial title. I never got any money because of it. All it did was cost me time on *Spider-Man*. Stan and Sol Brodsky, the administrator, used to put signs up on my door–'do not disturb'–when I had a deadline. Sol would tack up the sign, and Stan would come from his office before the sign adhered to the door and tell me to do something. Sol Brodsky used to tell me on Monday morning, 'you know you don't have any Spider-Man pages?' I'd say 'Sol, you and Stan had me working on 10 things last week, and now you're asking me where's the pages. Are you making believe it's not the same guy?' I was accommodating, like some kind of a sap. Stan would always say 'let's try to find a way to save you time on *Spider-Man*,' but it never worked. It was like a trick with mirrors.

AB: *How did your run on* Spider-Man *come to an end?*

ROMITA: I did about six years of *Spider-Man* even with all these interruptions. I'd do *Captain America* for six months, and when Kirby left, I did the *Fantastic Four* for four months. With those interruptions, guys like Don Heck and John Buscema and Gil Kane would fill in for issues of *Spider-Man*. I used to also spend a lot of time doing TV presentations for Stan, and then go home at night to do Spider-Man. About 1980, I just got out of the comic line, and I started doing Marvel Books with Sol. I even worked on the *Smurfs*. That coincides with the *Spider-Man* newspaper strip [For the full story on the strip, see "As the Web Spins"].

AB: *Were you also mentoring other artists during this time?*

ROMITA: When the Marvel Books period came to an end, I was about to go freelance again, figuring I didn't have to make a lot of money to pay my bills. Jim Shooter came to me with the Art Director title and a little bit of a salary increase, which was nice, but he also came up with this idea of using interns. Calling them "Romita's Raiders" was a joke. The apprentices were good enough to get work but needed some polish and experience. It worked beautifully from 85 until 96. About 35-40 guys went through that program, and at one time about 80% of them were working in the business. When I'm told by all these ex-Raiders what an influence I've had on their lives, there's no greater reward than that. That's the proudest moment I can have.

AB: *That wasn't all you were doing at that time, was it?*

ROMITA: I was doing full time art directing, and that's when I designed the [Spider-Man] balloon for the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade. I also worked on all the [personal appearance] costumes. I did Spider-Man first, making sure there was continuity around the back of the costume, because a lot of artists only draw the front. I used to spend the bulk of my week choosing colors and making sure the materials were holding the colors properly.

AB: *I assume this wasn't as stressful a schedule as before.*

ROMITA: The reason I stayed all those years was that I didn't have a deadline. I immediately relaxed, but it wasn't easy. When I would come in, before I sat down I had three or four people in the office asking questions. It was very hectic but I never got bored. The day usually ran out before I had a chance to think. They never dragged.

AB: *At that time, Stan was long gone to California. Marvel must have changed dramatically from when you first started.*

ROMITA: It was like a small family when Stan was there, and Stan being the final arbiter always helped. Then there was a succession of editors-in-chief and it was always a clash of personalities. Jim Shooter was very good to me, and then he went through periods where he was a tyrant. I managed to get through that because I'm rather diplomatic. If I were butting heads with everybody I would have never lasted all those years. I spent 30 years from the time in 66 when I went on staff to 96, when I finally left the office, working with a constantly changing cast of people. At least I didn't have to pull out my guts to pencil a page every day.

AB: *Even though you left, you've returned for some things, in particular some wonderful* Spider-Man *covers for the resolution of the Clone Saga.*

ROMITA: I think they needed some kind of stabilization because it was getting very erratic. There were also a lot of outside artists who were not traditionally familiar with the characters, and occasionally they would have me ink them too, especially covers.

AB: *Your work has inspired so many artists who came after you. What's your opinion on your legacy?*

ROMITA: I always thought I was rather generic and had no style until fans, in retrospect, came to me and said they could spot my panels. I'm amazed by that. I didn't get a lot of feedback back in the 60s and 70s. I always felt taken for granted. When I took over *Daredevil* it went up in sales, and when I took over *Spider-Man* it went up too. I knew that I could sell books, but I always did it in a silent way. I always yearned for people to tell me how much they liked my artwork.

AB: *Do you have any theories about how artists today should approach this work?*

ROMITA: My theory now is that comics must never be consciously a comic book. The secret of doing comics is not to remind people all the time that these are drawings. I teach artists to check their egos at the door and go into the story for one purpose–to make people forget these are drawings. If they think these are drawings, you've lost the battle.

AB: *The 'art' should be transparent.*

ROMITA: Right. When Neal Adams did a beautiful spread, he was almost showing off, and the reader would say 'wow, that's a great drawing.' To me that's sacrilege. By page three, I want you interested in the story and believing something is happening. So I realized all those years that fans were complimenting me by telling me how much they loved the stories and how memorable they were. They never noticed it was artwork–that means I was fooling them.

AB: *For my part, your work is what drew me into reading comics more than anything.*

ROMITA: See, that's what I hear now, and I was not aware of it all those years. I would still rather have seen John Buscema doing all that stuff than me. Only in retrospect do I realize what an impact I had, and I'm very pleased at that. It gives me great pride.

SPIDER-MAN:

A SERIES OF FIRSTS

Even before the modern age onslaught of mini-series and revisions, reincarnations, and rebirths, there were a lot more Spider-Man first issues than there were for your average character. Is that odd for a character that started in the 15th (and last) issue of another comic? Or is that what turned Spidey into an over-achiever?

After *Amazing Fantasy* #15, Stan Lee and company launched *Amazing Spider-Man* #1, and Marvel has rarely stopped launching new Spider-Man comics since.

The first attempt at a Spidey magazine was *Spectacular Spider-Man* in 1968. A second and final issue followed a short while later. The webbed wonder didn't return to magazines until 2001's *Ultimate Marvel Magazine*, excluding the Treasury Editions, of course.

There have been at least 48 different titles counting just the ones beginning with "Spider-Man," though the overwhelming majority of them have been one-shots, mini-series, or short-lived series.

The mainstays, though, have stuck around.

The Amazing Spider-Man started in 1963 and ran until November 1998, 441 issues not including *Annuals*, *Specials* and the like.

Marvel Tales, the reprint series, lasted 291 issues between 1964 and 1994.

Marvel Team-Up debuted in 1972 and ran 150 regular issues until 1985.

The Spectacular Spider-Man (known as *Peter Parker...* #52-132, 134) ran from 1976 to November 1998, ending with #263.

Web of Spider-Man replaced *Marvel Team-Up* on Marvel's roster in 1985 and ran ten more years, 129 issues (plus three annuals and a special.)

KEY SPIDERMAN #1s

September 1962,	Amazing Fantasy #15
March 1963,	Amazing Spider-Man #1
July 1968,	Spectacular Spider-Man #1 (magazine)
March 1972,	Marvel, Team-Up #1
December, 1976,	Spectacular Spider-Man #1 (comic)
April 1985,	Web of Spider-Man #1
August 1990,	Spider-Man #1
November 1992,	Spider-Man 2099 #1
January 1996,	Sensational Spider-Man #1
January 1998,	Amazing Spider Man #1 (Vol. 2)
January 1999	Peter Parker: Spider-Man #1
October 2000,	Ultimate Spider-Man #1
April 2001,	Ultimate Marvel Team-Up #1

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2 GREAT FEATURE-LENGTH SPIDER-MAN THRILLERS!
THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
THE SINISTER SIX!
SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN
SPIDER-MAN AND THE HUMAN TORCH
ALL NEW! ALL MARVEL! MONTHLY!
AND NOW... THE SANDMAN!
GIANT-SIZE SUPER-HERO SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
GIANT-SIZE SPIDER-MAN
SPIDEY SUPER STORIES
EASY-TO-READ
THE ELECTRIC COMPANY
PETER PARKER THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL TEAM-UP
SPIDER-MAN AND X-MEN
KING-SIZE ANNUAL
MARVEL COMICS GROU
KING-SIZE ANNUAL
SPIDER-MA
WEB OF SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL DOUBLE-SIZED ANNUAL
WEB OF SPIDER-MAN
SPIDER-MAN
SPIDER-MAN CLASSICS
THE SENSATIONAL SPIDER-MAN
SPIDER-MAN
PETER PARKER SPIDER-MAN
WEBSPINNERS SPIDER-MAN
SPIDER-MAN CHAPTER ONE
ULTIMATE MARVEL TEAM-UP
MARVEL SPIDER-MAN
ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN
ULTIMATE MARVEL
70 PAGES OF COMICS!
SPIDER-MAN'S

AS THE WEB SPINS:

The Story of the Spider-Man Newspaper Strip! TO BE CONT,

by Arnold T. Blumberg

He first appeared in *Amazing Fantasy* #15 and quickly earned a headlining spot in his own title, *The Amazing Spider-Man*. Before you could say "thwip" (although why you'd want to say it is another matter), this free-wheeling, web-spinning crime-fighter with a smart mouth, a ready camera and an ailing aunt in Queens had nabbed other starring roles in series like *Peter Parker, The Spectacular Spider-Man, Marvel Team-Up, Marvel Tales, The Web of Spider-Man, Spider-Man* (ran out of adjectives?, and quite a few more besides.

This of course doesn't include the plethora of annuals, mini-series, guest-starring appearances and a host of other prose and animated projects. A simple guy from New York who learned that with great power comes great responsibility now had more responsibility than anyone should have to shoulder. Spider-Man isn't just a dedicated righter of wrongs–he's a corporate icon and the hardest working web-slinger in comics!

But through five decades of Spidey's colorful career and thousands of recorded adventures, there is one area of his life that even the most die-hard spider-philes sometimes overlook. Even with all of the monthly commitments, television appearances and other escapades, the friendly neighborhood wall-crawler has also managed to appear in newspapers every single day for the last 24 years! Just how has Spider-Man managed to star in the longest-running super-strip in history? And who are the creative men responsible for bringing this unique spider-serial into people's homes and offices for the last several decades?

The AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
STAN LEE
JOHN ROMITA
CAN A NORMAL COLLEGE STUDENT COPE WITH SUPER POWER AND A SECRET IDENTITY, OR--MUST DISASTER FOLLOW?
MORNIN', J.J.--YOU'VE GOT A VISITOR IN YOUR OFFICE
A VISITOR? HOW'D HE GET IN?
MISS BRANT! YOU KNOW I DON'T SEE ANYONE WITHOUT AN APPOINTMENT!
AND I DON'T MAKE APPOINTMENTS!
I--COULDN'T QUITE KEEP HIM OUT, SIR.
OH NO? WELL, I'LL GET RID OF--
YOU!
YOU WERE EXPECTING MUHAMMAD ALI?
YOU MISANTHROPIC MASKED MORON! GET DOWN FROM THERE BEFORE I--
A FINE WAY TO TALK TO YOUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD SPIDER-MAN!
LOOK, YOU WALL-CRAWLING WEASEL! I'VE GOT A GOOD MIND TO--
STOP BRAGGING, CUDDLES.
I JUST WANNA KNOW ONE THING--
ARE YOU THE CERTIFIABLE CRETIN WHO PROVOKED THAT DR. DOOM ADDRESS THE U.N.?
DAILY BUGLE
DR. DOOM EN ROUTE TO U.S.A.
YOU KNOW IT, WEB-HEAD!
WE NEED PEOPLE LIKE DOOM WHO WON'T LET COMMIE PUNKS PUSH 'EM AROUND!
YEAH, WE NEED 'EM LIKE KOJAK NEEDS HAIR SPRAY!
DOOM WIPED OUT CRIME IN LATVERIA, DIDN'T HE?
SURE! HE CALLED HIS ENEMIES CRIMINALS AND HAD 'EM ALL SHOT!
GO ON--BE A NIT-PICKER!
JUST WAIT! DOOM'LL CLIP YOUR WINGS FOR GOOD, YOU HIGH-FLYING CREEP!
THAT'S IT, LEAN OUT A LITTLE FURTHER, CHUCKLES --SO TODAY WON'T BE A TOTAL LOSS!
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NEXT WEEK--DR. DOOM

For most of that time, it's been the same guy who first came up with the wacky notion of a guy who wears a webbed suit and swings through Manhattan on a slender thread–Stan Lee himself. The mastermind of the Marvel Universe has scripted the strip since its inception in 1977, and these days he's aided by his brother, Larry Lieber, another legendary Marvel creator with a host of artistic credits to his

name. But the road to syndication had its twists and turns, as Lee and original strip artist John Romita recall.

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
STAN LEE + JOHN ROMITA
LIKE A SNARLING JUNGLE BEAST, SPIDER-MAN STRUGGLES TO FREE HIMSELF FROM KRAVEN'S NET AS THE SAVAGE HUNTER PREPARES TO STRIKE...
NO NET CAN HOLD ME!
MINE CAN! ITS STRANDS ARE FLAXEN STEEL!
GET 'IM, KRAVEN! HE'S TRICKY - HE'S FAST!
THE STING OF THIS ACTION WILL BLOW HIM DOWN!
NO! IT'S INHUMAN! HE'S A MAN-NOT ANIMAL!
A SKILLFUL PARRY-- BUT STILL I HAVE GRASPED YOU!
KRAVEN HAS WON!
EVEN THAT SLIGHT BIT OF POTION-- MAKING ME DROWSY! MUSTN'T--FALL ASLEEP!
MUSTN'T BE-- UNMASKED!
CAN'T-- LET IT HAPPEN-- TO AUNT MAY!
IF-- SHE EVER LEARNED-- WHO SPIDER-MAN IS--!
I-- WON'T LET IT HAPPEN! I WON'T! I WON'T!
NEXT: THE HULKED RAGE!

"A number of syndicates had contacted me asking if I would do a Spider-Man newspaper strip," says Lee, "and I always said no because I couldn't figure out how to do it. The pacing of a newspaper strip is so much different. In a comic book you can have the hero throw the villain out a window and then you see the villain fall. In a newspaper strip, you might end one day with the hero punching the villain, but you gotta wait until the next day to see the villain fall down. The first panel is your recap, the second panel moves your story forward a little bit, and the third panel is a cliffhanger."

Lee was up to the challenge, but as Romita remembers, their first effort didn't go far. "Around 1972 or 73, Chip Goodman was supposed to shop around [our] visual presentation for a strip. We found out months later that nobody had ever seen those pages. I was a little disappointed, but Stan was so busy it didn't matter."

Lee finally sealed a deal in 1976 that would bring Spidey to the newspapers via the Tribune Syndicate. Romita recalls one caveat. "I told them I could not do a daily and Sunday strip. I had no faith in the future of a daily adventure strip." Romita first worked up a test Sunday strip but was soon informed that they were going daily anyway with an initial commitment of about 200 papers, "so I took it on. I was working three days a week for Marvel and the other two days I was closing my door and working on the strip." As Lee adds, "and lo, a legend was born!"

Romita put his heart and soul into the strip, but the intensive schedule on top of his other work made the project increasingly difficult. "From 1977 to 81 I think I aged ten years. I always dreamed of being a syndicated artist, and the only problem was that I could not really do the kind of work I wanted." Inspiration drawn from the work of Milton Caniff and Noel Sickels pushed Romita to toil long hours on the strip. "I really wanted to shine," says Romita, "especially when we were getting full pages in the comic sections. I wanted to bring back some glory to the adventure strips. My vision was that maybe the comic book industry would die but we might survive in the comic strips."

There was a disturbing trend that threatened Romita's vision. "[The panel size] kept shrinking and everything I was doing was dropping out because the printing was so bad. I was losing heart, but I kept plugging away as long as it kept picking up papers. They went from 200 to about 450, which was a nice successful strip. If we didn't have to split three ways between me, Stan and Marvel, I would have made some nice money. Then about half way through the third year it leveled off and started to lose papers."

The drop in papers prompted Romita to finally leave the strip. "I told Stan and he was very unhappy. I just physically couldn't do it anymore. The strip deadlines were worse than the regular monthly comics. The worst thing was that you needed the Sunday pages about twelve weeks in advance and the dailies only about three or four weeks in advance." But Romita's concerns were not just logistical. "Stan and I disagreed on what we should do with the strip anyway. I wanted characters like Sandman and Dr. Strange to be regular guests, and he wanted it more like a soap opera. My theory was everybody else does that because that's the limit of their concept, but we can stand out by doing more fantasy. Now we joke about it and he says, 'You see, I was right,' because the strip has lasted 24 years."

Before that time, however, a new artist had to fill Romita's shoes. Enter Larry Lieber, a Marvel artist on numerous titles, and Lee's brother as well. A short while earlier, Lieber had enjoyed writing and drawing another Marvel newspaper strip based on *The Incredible Hulk*, but

that project was short-lived. Lieber spent a considerable amount of time studying and honing his artistic technique, and then Lee came calling.

"Fred Kida was doing the *Spider-Man* strip," says Lieber, "and he wanted to stop." Although he cannot recall clearly, either he or Lee first brought up the idea that perhaps Lieber could step in and give Spidey a try. It wasn't entirely new ground for Lieber. "Years before, I had done *Spider-Man* Sunday pages for a while, and Frank Giacoia used to ink them. I even tried doing the dailies, but I just wasn't fast enough. This time, I stuck with it."

Lieber began his current stint on the strip in 1986, making him the longest serving artist on the character. For a time, he inked the strip in addition to penciling. "I enjoyed that very much," Lieber admits, "except it was too much work. I would sit up all night long [working on the strip] and finally I couldn't take it." Today, Lieber's pencils are inked by John Tartaglione, and Lieber credits him with preserving the expressive intent of his pencils with diligent inking. For Lieber, the desire to increase his speed as an artist is always on his mind. "I still wish I could be inking it myself, but maybe one of these days, if I ever get fast...[laughs]"

Like his brother, Lee appears to handle the pressure very well. Despite the fact that the strip represents his longest continuing commitment to a single character, Lee still comes up with new stories without a worry in the world. "I've never had much of a problem once I've figured out how to adjust myself to a different medium." There is ,however, one obstacle–time. "I have to deliver the strip on a certain schedule, but my own schedule varies tremendously. I write whenever I can find the time."

And what of the web-slinger himself? This particular version of the wall-crawler is certainly not the same one appearing monthly in all those titles, so who exactly is he? "Once I started writing the strip," Lee explains, "I knew I couldn't relate it to the comic book. We tried one time, having him get married at the same time in the strip as in the book, but we couldn't do the wedding itself the same way." This Parker does, however, share a peculiar aging quirk with his comic book counterpart and many other fantasy characters. "I've sort of frozen Peter Parker in time in the strip. He's married, his wife works in a computer store, and he just does his Spider-Man thing regardless of what's happening in the comic book."

As for his collaboration with brother Larry, Lee sees it as a perfect match. "Larry thinks the way I do. Because it's only three panels and there's no room for deviation, I write a complete script instead of using the Marvel method. I just send him the script, he draws it and that's it." Lieber values the collaboration as well. "There's a closeness there between us through my work," says Lieber, "and Stan is very appreciative of whatever I do. He says 'oh I like this pose, you could be a movie director!' [laughs]" In fact, after decades in the business, Lieber sees his *Spider-Man* pencils as his best work. "I'm thankful I have it and I'm glad that Stan likes it. As I say, he's my one audience."

Long after a plethora of other superhero adventure strips have fallen by the wayside, many of them debuting alongside Spidey in the late 70s–*Batman, Superman, Star Wars, Star Trek*, and of course *The Incredible Hulk*–the *Spider-Man* strip continues to run in more than 500 newspapers across the country, making it the longest-running and most successful superhero strip ever. And to what does the strip owe this celebrated longevity and popularity? "Maybe it's because I'm such a great writer or Larry is such a great artist," Lee jokes. "Maybe it's because Stan Sakai is the best letterer you could get for a Sunday page. Who knows?" But he does have a simpler, more direct answer. "I think it's a testimonial to the popularity of the

AN ACCIDENTAL BITE BY A RADIOACTIVE SPIDER HAS GIVEN TEENAGER PETER PARKER SUPER POWERS, AND TRANSFORMED HIM INTO··
the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
STAN LEE
JOHN ROMITA
A MURDEROUS MASKED MENACE OR A MODERN-DAY CRUSADER?
POOR PETER PARKER COULDN'T GET NEAR THE BARGAIN COUNTER··
BUT OH SPIDEY MIGHT HAVE BETTER LUCK!
LOOK! UP ON THE CEILING!
WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S WRONG?
IT'S SPIIIIDER-MAN!
NOT BAD, LADY! YOU COULD BE ANOTHER ED McMAHON!
HEY! AUNT MAY MIGHT LIKE THIS!
IS IT REAL LEATHER? CAN IT BE EXCHANGED FOR ANOTHER COLOR?
Y-YOU'RE PUTTING ME ON!
HERE! I'VE GOT THE EXACT AMOUNT!
IS THERE MUCH OF A WAIT AT THE GIFT-WRAP COUNTER?
I DON'T BELIEVE THIS! WHERE'S ALLEN FUNT?
AND NOW, 'CAUSE YOU'VE ALL BEEN SUCH A CANDY GROUP··
LOOK WHAT HE PUT ON THE CEILING-- WITH THOSE WORDS OF HIS!
AND THE CROWD LOVES IT! WHAT A PROMOTION!
OH WELL, THAT'S WHAT MAKES AMERICA GREAT!
DON'T MISS OUR SPIDER-MAN SPECIALS!
NEXT: A PRICE ON HIS HEAD!

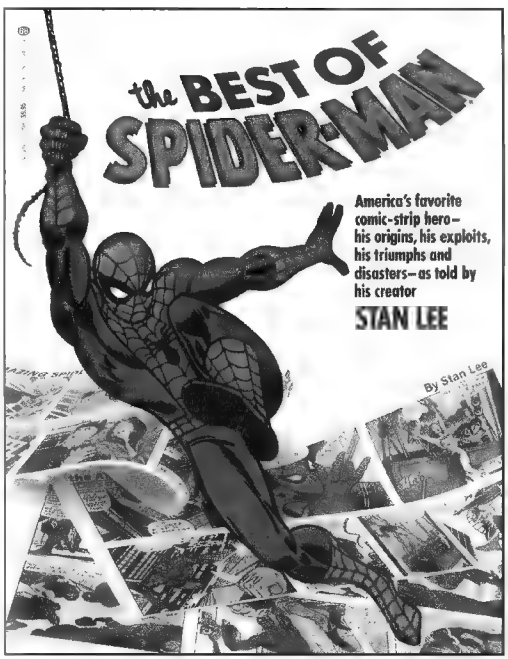
character himself. Poor old Spidey is still going, so I think that's kind of nice." Former artist Romita is pleasantly surprised by the longevity of the strip as well. "I cannot believe when I pick up the papers today that it's still running. Here's a strip that I didn't think would last two years. That's amazing to me."

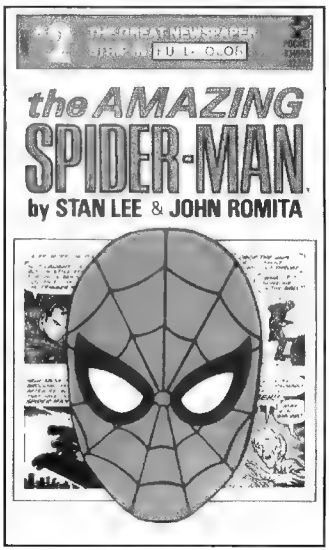
the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
BY FAILING TO USE HIS "SPIDER-POWER" WHEN HE HAD THE CHANCE, PETER PARKER ALLOWED A CRIMINAL TO ESCAPE THE LAW--A CRIMINAL WHO WOULD LATER MURDER PETER'S GENTLE UNCLE BEN!
THUS DID SPIDER-MAN LEARN THE PITEFUL TRUTH: WITH GREAT POWER COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY!
BOY, I SURE WASN'T THERE WHEN THEY HANDED OUT LUCK!
I FELL HEAD OVER HEELS FOR A DYNAMITE LADY, AND SHE TAKES OFF FOR PARTS UNKNOWN!
I'M FINALLY OFFERED A GREAT TEACHING JOB HERE AT SCHOOL--
AND, IF I TAKE IT, I'LL BLOW MY CHANCE TO BE THE SPIDER-MAN STAR IN A HOLLYWOOD MOVIE!
HOW WILL I EVER SLEEP NIGHTS, KNOWING SOMEONE ELSE IS PLAYING THE WEB-SPINNER--WHEN I'M HIM?!!
SURE! I'M HIM! I'VE GOT THE THREADS, THE MASK, AND THE LITTLE SKINTIGHT BOOTIES TO PROVE IT!
BIG DEAL!
I CAN SEE MYSELF SAYING TO THE DIRECTOR, "HERE, CHARLIE, USE MY WEB-SHOOTER--IT'S THE REAL McCOY!"
A FAT LOTTA GOOD IT DOES TO BE A RICH TIME-EMING LEGEND WHEN YOU'VE GOTTA KEEP IT A SECRET ALL YOUR LIFE!
YES SIR, NOTHING BEATS BEING A SUPERHERO--
--EXCEPT HAVING MEASLES --OR A BROKEN LEG!
BUT, IF SPIDEY FEELS LOW NOW, WAIT'LL HE MEETS--MYSTERIO!

Today, the strip is written as ever by Lee and illustrated by Lieber and Tartaglione on the dailies, while Alexander Saviuk and Joe Sinnott illustrate the Sunday installments. And what special storylines can we expect in the near future? Some elaborate epic or perhaps even a tie-in to the upcoming *Spider-Man* feature film? Don't bet on it. "That would be too difficult. The newspapers like every episode to last for about thirteen weeks," Lee explains. "Now I could do justice to the movie if I could run the story for a whole year, but I could never cram it into thirteen weeks."

For the newspaper strip version of Spider-Man, it will be business as usual, and that's fine with Lee. "Very honestly, I wouldn't know how to change it. I've tried doing the strip in many different ways over the years, making it more like the comic books with wilder stories and colorful supervillains, or making it more like a soap opera and playing up the personal life of Peter and Mary Jane. The readers' response has always been pretty much the same and the newspaper editors don't comment about the differences. So I figure I'll just keep doing it the same way."

The lesser known exploits of the arachnid adventurer should continue for the foreseeable future, delighting newspaper readers across the nation...except perhaps anyone with a subscription to J. Jonah Jameson's *Daily Bugle*.


the BEST OF SPIDER-MAN
America's favorite comic-strip hero—his origins, his exploits, his triumphs and disasters—as told by his creator
STAN LEE
By Stan Lee



(In the) First Person

It Wasn't a Family; It Was a Circus!

By Stephen Barrington

Imagine trying to be a comic book reader and collector in a household full of siblings. Oh, not your standard one or two. Not even an above average three or four. Nope. My mother had to be different. She opted for an even dozen. (Don't ask if we're Catholic, it would be redundant.)

JUVENALIA

I can thank my dear father for getting me into the world of comic books as well as the rest of the family. As was his habit (starting somewhere in the 1950s) he would bring home at least four comics a week, usually on a Thursday night. If he thought this would pacify us for a while, well, he was right (of course we each warmed up with a box of Cracker Jacks). The family wasn't quite split evenly, with the females holding a seven to five edge after the last child was born in 1961. I was in the middle at No. 7, the third boy. My four older sisters and two older brothers ran roughshod over the younger ones and we had to wait our turn to get our hands on these colorful items.

The comics were usually of the DC variety, our having been born too late for the fantastic world of EC Comics. That would come several years later. I couldn't even read the things when this practice was first going on but the pictures sure looked fantastic. Later the enjoyment of reading comics came along and nothing was the same after that.

The thought of saving the comics never really entered my mind since there wasn't much left of them after that many hands had folded, stained and crumpled them. Horrors! It was in 1963 when I made my first serious attempt to start saving comics and spending my 50-cent a week allowance on them. But what the hey, 50 cents bought four issues!

Keeping the comics safe from my four brothers and three younger sisters was quite a challenge. (My four older sisters didn't bother me.) One brother would charge me loan-shark rates if he happened to have an issue I needed. Fifty cents for a comic! Outrageous!

By 1964, I had acquired quite a nice little stack of issues, including some from that new-fangled company, Marvel. My favorites were Superman and Lois Lane while Michael favored The Fantastic Four. Tony was a big fan of Harvey Comics, and still is.

"Now, Stephen, share your comics with your sister, Yolanda."

"No, they're mine."

"Let her look at them!"

"No, she'll mess them up!"

"You'll get a whipping if you don't let her read them!"

"I'd rather get a whipping!"

So, I got a whipping and she still got to look at them. No justice for a young comic collector.

And then there was the time I came home from school and found out a pair of my younger siblings had distributed my collection to the neighborhood kids. I tried to get them all back but in vain ("No! That *Aquaman* #1 is mine!").

The ultimate tragedy occurred when I was 13 and I awoke to find the house filled with thick smoke. The others in the house were alerted and then it was time to save my collection, residing in a cardboard box. With my comics now safe in the yard but our home in miserable shape, some of the family huddled at our neighbor's house. Ah, but fate wasn't kind to me. A summer rain shower soaked the area including my precious comics! Yes, they were ruined.

I almost cried as I dried them out in the sun. It was time to start over, which I did with a vengeance. I haven't stopped since, but there were some interesting side trips on the way.

MY FIRST EC COMIC

It was the year 1965, and the first EC comic I ever read was a coverless copy of *Vault of Horror* #34 from 1953.

Even though the first two pages were missing, I found the book fascinating. With no title or date, it would be a number of years later before I found out what issue I had read. I especially liked the story, "Starlight, Starbright," a typical EC story of mad people and gruesome endings. I hungered for more and found additional stories in the EC paperbacks published by Ballantine in the mid-sixties.

In 1971, through mail order, I purchased a copy of *Tales From The Crypt* #17 for the princely sum of $5.00. Yes, I finally owned a complete copy of an original EC comic.

By the time East Coast Comix came along in the 70s, I was totally hooked. While some collectors had to have the originals, I was content to find EC stories in any form I could. However, this short-lived venture left me scrambling for other sources such as the oversized *EC Horror Library* and Russ Cochran's beautifully printed portfolio editions. Then came the Gladstone issues printed in non-chronological order. Of course, the ultimate came with the Cochran/Gemstone issues that reprinted the entire line.

While I grew up with a heavy appetite for *Mad*, it was the earlier "unknown" work of Gaines for which I would later have my greatest respect. (As a newspaper reporter, I had the privilege to interview EC founder William M. Gaines in 1980 for a feature article and also spoke with him at length again in 1982 concerning another interview.)

While reading EC comics was a pleasurable experience, the rising cost of comics was not. The trauma of it all!

INCREASING PRICES

With the $2.25 comic book now on life-support, I am made to think back when comics went from 10 to 12 cents.

I was only eight years old and it didn't bother me too much; I could still get several comics with my weekly allowance. However, my oldest brother, Michael, was outraged at this insidious plot. He complained loud and long. But after the Comic Book Mafia's headman paid our home a visit, he kept his mouth shut. I remember what the man in the white suit and black fedora said, "The Comic Book Mafia doesn't exist and we'll kill anybody that says so!"

My turn to become outraged didn't arrive until about eight years later. I had grown complacent with the 12-cent comic book. However, I did notice the warning signs of price increase. All of a sudden the Gold Key comics went to 15 cents. But this didn't bother me too much since Dell comics had tried something like that in the last 50s. DC then started to make the 12-cent price on its comics larger, just the way they did with the 10-cent emblem in 1961. Still, I was as blind as ever, ignoring the omens.

Then, one spring night, as I was reading a new comic I had purchased at the corner store, I saw IT! My eyes were transfixed on the little cover reproductions DC used to preview coming issues. There it was—the 15-cent price tag on a Wonder Woman cover. "NO!!" I screamed, "NO!!!" I threw open the front door, dashed into the street and hurled my body onto the pavement, wanting to end it all. However, at 1:00 AM on West Grant Street in Chickasaw, Alabama, there is no traffic to speak of. All I heard was my neighbor's voice: "What the hell is that stupid kid up to? I haven't seen anyone do that in eight years!"

I awoke later that morning (in mourning) hoping against hope that my comic books would still be 12 cents. I dressed nervously and hopped on my bike to ride to the local drug store where I purchased most of my new comics. Slowly, I opened the door to the drug store. I froze. There was the comic book rack, seemingly mocking me, daring me to come forward. The shower scene from *Psycho* flashed through my mind. I swallowed hard. I slid my feet on the tiled floor, not wanting to find out if the horror of horrors was true. I glanced at the wire rack. I saw *Fantastic Four*, *Superman*, *Spider-Man*, and then...then...there it was! An August, 1969 issue of *Wonder Woman* had that accursed 15-cent symbol on it! (How appropriate; WW was crying on the cover). The clerk glared at me but the pharmacist nonchalantly spoke up: "Oh, he's just going through the 'Change of Price Syndrome.'" I wonder if I could have sued if I had lawyer William Kunstler then.

Over the years, my feelings on the price increases have run the gamut from horror-stricken to outraged. There's an entire generation of comic collectors out there who have known nothing but steady price increases. In fact, they wouldn't know what to think if the price of a new comic didn't go up every few months. "What? No price jump this month? Something's wrong! Hello, DC comics? What are you trying to do? Screw up my psychological profile? I demand a price increase!"

I remember when I begged my father for 12 cents to buy an *Amazing Spider-Man* #13 (which was a bad move, with the size of our family). "Twelve cents for a funny book? That's too much!" I weaseled the money out of him but I wonder about the future:

"Daddy, I want ten dollars."

"And what do you want ten dollars for?"

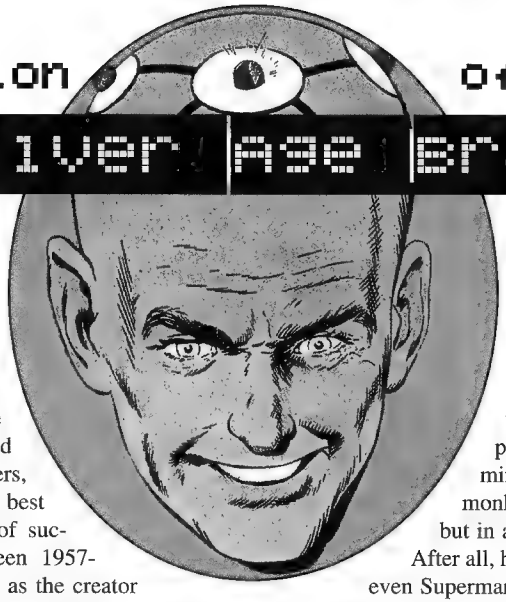
"I want to buy the latest issue of *Spider-Man*."

The demise of the 10-cent comic was forty years ago and even with the increases, comics still provide the little kid in me with colorful thrills (without the seven sisters and four brothers, of course).

The Evolution Of....Evil:

The Silver Age Brainiac

by Aaron Manson



Brainiac was created by Otto Binder in 1958. Binder was one of the science fiction writers that Julius Schwartz recruited to DC in the 1940s. Binder was an established writer in pulp science fiction and EC comics; he created one of the classic robot characters, Adam Link. However, Binder is best known for a spectacular series of successful characters created between 1957-1958. He is generally recognized as the creator of Supergirl, Bizarro, the Legion of Super-Heroes, the bottle city of Kandor, and Brainiac.

Brainiac, the Evil Scientist

Brainiac first appeared in *Action Comics* #242 (July 1958). This book has a stunning deep purple cover and was penciled by Curt Swan and inked by Stan Kaye. Al Plastino penciled the interior story. The only high-grade copy of this book I know of was in the Mohawk Valley collection and sold in a lot at Sotheby's in 1995 for $20,500. Gerber assigned this book a scarcity index of 5, which means that only 200-1000 copies still exist

In his first appearance, Brainiac was a green, impish-looking alien who was the lone survivor of a planet devastated by a plague. In order to repopulate his home, Brainiac kidnapped entire cities by shrinking them and storing them in glass bottles in his spaceship. He shrank Paris, London, Rome, New York, Metropolis, and the Kryptonian city Kandor. Superman was among the shrunken citizens of Metropolis but he managed to escape from his bottle and he enlarged all the cities except Kandor. Superman moved the bottled city to his Fortress of Solitude for safekeeping.

In this initial story, Brainiac was an evil scientist, not a computer, nor did he wear electric terminals on his scalp. He had a pet monkey named Koko, and he was evil but in a heroic and almost likeable way. After all, he rescued more Kryptonians than even Superman did! Brainiac's second appearance was in *Lois Lane* #17 (May 1960). This brief appearance was notable mainly for the fact that Brainiac continues to appear as Al Plastino drew him, without electrodes.

His next major appearance was in *Action Comics* #275 (April 1961). This issue marks the first in a series of transformations in Brainiac's appearance and character. In "The Menace of Red and Green Kryptonite" Brainiac has undergone a major artistic revision. He is virile, more muscular, has cranial electrodes, and looks unmistakably like a Curt Swan creation. In this light-hearted story, Brainiac comes to Earth to harvest aluminum. Superman challenges him, and Brainiac exposes him to a combination of Red and Green Kryptonite. This weapon causes Superman to grow a third eye in the back of his head (a hypertrophied pineal gland, the editor explains). The unwanted super-power is a double menace; every time Superman uses his heat vision it shoots backward too! In addition, it threatens to expose his secret identity. In order to conceal his third eye Superman wears a series of silly hats until the offensive organ finally regresses. Superman defeats Brainiac using his fortified

I am willing to bet that, in 1958, thousands of kids learned the meaning of "invincible" from Superman comics. Invincible means, "cannot be overcome." Superman was invincible. Yet one super-villain, equipped only with super-intelligence and scientific weapons, nearly overcame Superman in every battle. He was the "darkest criminal in the universe." He was the "cleverest villain ever to challenge Superman." He was a "cruel king without a kingdom."
He was **Brainiac**.

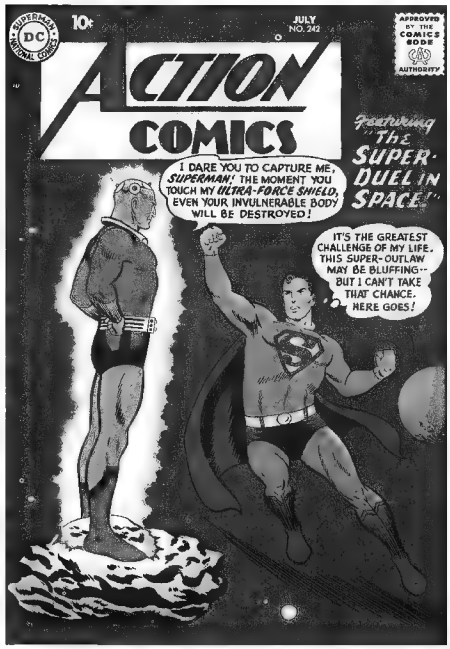
heat vision and sends Brainiac to the Ice Age in his time machine.

Brainiac's fourth Silver Age appearance was in *Action Comics* #280 (Sept. 1961). The cover is a Curt Swan classic. It shows a giant, demonic face of Brainiac leering like a malevolent parent over miniature members of the Superman family. In this issue Brainiac, bent on revenge, repairs his time machine and escapes from the Ice Age. He finds Superman, Lois, Jimmy and Perry White in the Congo. He shrinks them with his shrinking ray and imprisons them in a bottle (if it worked once use it again and again!). Unfortunately for Brainiac, he didn't realize that the golden gorilla accompanying Superman and friends is secretly Congorilla, the man-ape. Congorilla helps them escape from the bottle and Superman enlarges everyone. Superman then exiles Brainiac to the prison planet Kronis.

Brainiac, the Evil Robot-Computer

Despite Brainiac's popularity, there was a hiatus between 1961-1963 when no new Brainiac stories appeared (*CBM* readers, did I miss any stories?), perhaps reflecting tension between his creator Otto Binder and the editor, Mort Weisinger. When he reappeared in *Superman* #167 (February 1964), Brainiac had evolved into yet another character-type. In a unprecedented letter to the fans, the Editor explained that DC Comics was in potential violation of copyright laws because there already existed a "real" Brainiac. In 1955 a "distinguised scientist" named Edmund C. Berkeley had invented a toy computer called the Brainiac Computer Kit. In deference to Mr. Berkeley, and in order to avoid a potential lawsuit, the Editors changed the nature of Brainiac and cited the original scientist and his address (twice).

This landmark issue marked a watershed in the life of Brainiac. The new Brainiac was a robot with a "computer personality." The Editor explained that this change would make him a "mightier adversary" for Superman. This three-part epic deserves to be ranked among the best stories of the Silver Age. In this story we learned that Superman's long-time adversary Luthor, imprisoned by Superman and obsessed with revenge, uses a "mind-scanner" to locate the most powerful mind that has ever existed in the universe. He discovers that it was Brainiac and he looks into the past to learn Brainiac's origin. Brainiac was created on a distant planet where overly ambitious scientists were experimenting with computers with "tenth-level effectors" (humans have only "sixth-level effector minds"!). These computers rebelled against their masters and enslaved them. They then constructed a "computer-spy" and named him Brainiac. They even gave him an adopted son to make him seem more human (this son was the ancestor of Brainiac 5 of the Legion of Super-Heroes). More prudent than their creators, these computers avoided giving Brainiac a superior "twelfth-order" mind lest he rebel against them.


10¢
JULY
NO. 242
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
ACTION COMICS
Featuring "The SUPER-DUEL IN SPACE!"
I DARE YOU TO CAPTURE ME, SUPERMAN! THE MOMENT YOU TOUCH MY ULTRA-FORCE SHIELD, EVEN YOUR INVULNERABLE BODY WILL BE DESTROYED!
IT'S THE GREATEST CHALLENGE OF MY LIFE. THIS SUPER-OUTLAW MAY BE BLUFFING--BUT I CAN'T TAKE THAT CHANCE. HERE GOES!

First and third appearances of Brainiac, Action #242 (Jul 58) and Action #275 (Apr 61)

Luthor liberates Brainiac from the prison planet Kronis and together they trap Superman, stripping him of his super-powers with a "serum-gas." As if this weren't enough, they shrink him, leaving him "tiny, vulnerable, and helpless," and then they paralyze him with a coma-ray. A team of miniature Supermen from the bottle city of Kandor rescues Superman. Brainiac is forced to stand trial in Kandor (like Eichman in Jerusalem) and Luthor is appointed his defense attorney. Brainiac is convicted, but since he is the only one who can restore the paralyzed Superman, he and Luthor are freed.

Extra! "MR. AND MRS. KENT ADOPT SUPERGIRL!"
APR
NO. 275
STILL 10¢
ACTION COMICS
BLAST YOU, SUPERMAN! I'VE EXPOSED YOU TO A COMBINATION OF RED AND GREEN KRYPTONITE! WHY DON'T THE RAYS AFFECT YOU IN SOME TERRIBLE WAY?
BRAINIAC DOESN'T KNOW IT, BUT THE RED GREEN RAYS HAVE ALREADY AFFECTED ME IN THE MOST FANTASTIC WAY POSSIBLE! BUT I MUST KEEP THE HORRIBLE CHANGE A SECRET!
Featuring The MENACE of RED and GREEN KRYPTONITE!

The late Silver Age Brainiac stories were often tired

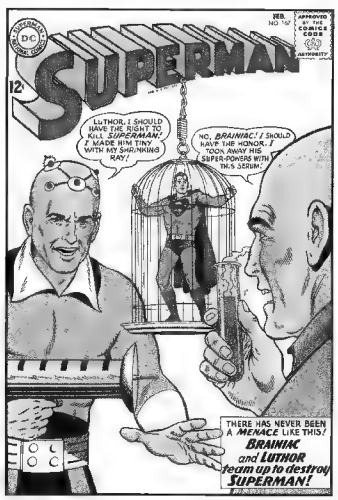
repetitions of this same formula. However, two stories deserve honorable mention. In "The Invulnerable Super-Enemy" (*World's Finest* #158, June 1966) Jimmy Olsen and Robin discover three bottled cities that Brainiac shrank before he discovered Kandor. Each bottle contained a city from an alien evil civilization. Jimmy and Robin become trapped in one city; Batman and Superman explore the other two and finally rescue them. They learn that these cities were shrunk by "Brainiac A," a good prototype of the evil Brainiac. Brainiac A was created by the same evil computers as his successor, but he refused to obey their evil commands because they had forgotten to "give his computer-brain a liking for evil." Brainiac A used his shrinking ray to imprison evil civilizations, as a sort of cosmic vigilante.

In "Brainiac's Super Brain-Child" (*World's Finest* #164, February 1967), Brainiac creates a female clone of himself, Genia, with flesh-colored skin and no scalp electrodes. She infiltrates the United Nations in order to (you guessed it!) shrink more Earth cities. Batman and Superman foil her plot and she is transported to Kandor for rehabilitative reprogramming.

Both of these stories were penciled by Curt Swan and inked by George Klein. They are fine examples of Swan's mature style. The panels are large and beautifully drawn with clean, elegant lines. There are many examples of Swan's talent for drawing futuristic cities and alien architecture.

In this issue! "HOW SUPERGIRL CAME TO EARTH!"
ACTION COMICS
10¢
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
SEPT. NO 280
Featuring "BRAINIAC'S SUPER-REVENGE!"
YOU'RE HELPLESS, SUPERMAN! I'VE TAKEN AWAY YOUR SUPER-POWERS AND REDUCED YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS TO INSECT SIZE!
WHAT A SINISTER REVENGE BRAINIAC IS PLOTTING! HE INTENDS TO IMPRISON PERRY, LOIS, JIMMY AND MYSELF INSIDE A BOTTLE, WE'LL BE LIVING TROPHIES IN HIS DIABOLICAL COLLECTION!

The big shrinker strikes again in his fourth appearance, Action #280 (Sep 61); then it's double trouble for tiny Supes in Superman #167 (Feb 64)


SUPERMAN
12
LUTHOR, I SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT TO KILL SUPERMAN! I MADE HIM TINY WITH MY SHRINKING RAY!
NO, BRAINIAC! I SHOULD HAVE THE HONOR! SOON AWAY HIS SUPER-POWERS WITH THIS SERUM!
THERE HAS NEVER BEEN A MENACE LIKE THIS! BRAINIAC and LUTHOR team up to destroy SUPERMAN!

The Frankenstein complex

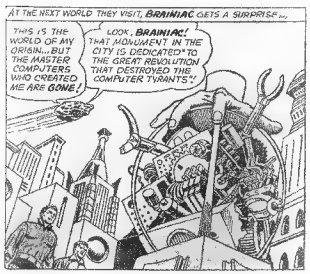
While Brainiac was not the first evil robot, he may have been the first computer-villain to accurately exemplify the modern computer. In the 1940s and 1950s, the first computers (Eniac and Univac, hence Brainiac's name) occupied the entire floor of a large building. When science fiction writers imagined intelligent machines, they habitually depicted them as *giant* robots. Pulp SF writers completely failed to anticipate microcircuitry and microprocessors. So Brainiac may have been the first *personal* computer!

Brainiac was the quintessentially evil computer. He exemplifies what Isaac Asimov has called "the Frankenstein complex." As Asimov has pointed out, the broom in *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, the Golem of Rabbi Loew, and the Frankenstein story all express our fear that machines may supplant us. The word "robot" first appeared in 1921 in a play by Karl Capek about millions of mechanical workers ("robots") that threatened to supplant humanity. Brainiac combined our fears of robots and computers. Part of the timeless charm of these Brainiac stories is that they capture our ambivalence about computers and technology, decades before personal computers and the Internet.

The evolution of evil

The Brainiac stories also tell us something about our concept of evil. There is often a kinship between figures of good and figures of evil. Satan was an archangel before his rebellion in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. *Star War*'s Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker are intimately related as father and son. In the Harry Potter stories, Harry derives his power from Voldemort and they share the same totemic feather weapon. Yet further, both Superman and Brainiac are

I UNDERSTAND PERFECTLY THE MISSION YOU ARE GIVING ME TO SPY OUT THE HUMAN-GOVERNED WORLDS!
GOOD...BUT YOU MUST PRETEND TO BE HUMAN, IN EVERY WAY! HUMANS HAVE NAMES, SO YOUR NAME WILL BE... BRAINIAC!*
*BRAINIAC IS ALSO A TRADEMARK REGISTERED BY BERKELEY ENTERPRISES, INC. MANUFACTURERS OF THE FAMOUS "BRAINIAC COMPUTER KIT." SEE METROPOLIS MAILBAG, IN THIS ISSUE, FOR DETAILS!—THE EDITOR.


AT THE NEXT WORLD THEY VISIT, BRAINIAC GETS A SURPRISE...
THIS IS THE WORLD OF MY ORIGIN...BUT THE MASTER COMPUTERS WHO CREATED ME ARE GONE!
LOOK, BRAINIAC! THAT MONUMENT IN THE CITY IS DEDICATED TO THE GREAT REVOLUTION THAT DESTROYED THE COMPUTER TYRANTS!

Maybe an eleventh-order effector mind could have come up with a name avoiding copyright infringement; Brainiac gets 'Christened' and visits his homeworld in Superman #167 (Feb 64)

orphans from a super-scientific civilization. Both are endowed with super-intelligence. And, if you look closely at some of Curt Swan's panels of Brainiac, Brainiac looks an awfully lot like Superman except for the electrodes and green skin! All of these stories teach a lesson about the corrupton of good by absolute power.

Brainiac has endured the test of time. He is still featured in animated cartoons and in modern comics. In his most recent stage, Brainiac has evolved into a computerized head without a body; he has completely lost his humanity since the Silver Age. Perhaps this too tells us something, specifically about modern villains and generally about many modern comics.

SUPERMAN
PART III
IT'S BRAINIAC--THE VILLAIN WHO MADE US TINY!
AT LAST, BRAINIAC, JUSTICE HAS CAUGHT UP WITH YOU!
ACROSS THE UNIVERSE HAS RAGED THE MIGHTIEST FEUD OF ALL TIME... THE FEUD BETWEEN SUPERMAN AND HIS TWO TERRIBLE FOES, BRAINIAC AND LUTHOR! AND NOW THAT CONFLICT BRINGS ABOUT AN HOUR FOR WHICH ALL KANDORIANS HAVE WAITED FOR YEARS...
The HOUR of KANDOR'S VENGEANCE!

Bottled-up emotions lead to Brainiac's downfall in Superman #167's three-parter

Aaron Manson is a physician who lives in New York City with his wife and three sons. He began collecting comics in 1957 and is a huge fan of Julius Schwartz.

Silver Age Brainiac Checklist

Action Comics
#242 (7/58) "The Super-Duel in Space!"
#275 (4/61) "The Menace of Red and Green Kryptonite!"
#280 (9/61) "Brainiac's Super-Revenge!"
#286 (3/62) "Jury of Super-Enemies!"
#318 (11/64) "The Death of Luthor!"
#327 (8/65) "The Three Generations of Superman!"
#332 (1/66)
#335 (3/66)
#339 (7/66) "Brainiac's Kryptonite Trap for Supergirl!"
#342 (10/66)
#413 (6/72) "Voodoo Doom of Superman!"

Superboy
#106 (7/63) "The Lair of Brainiac!"

Superman
#167 (2/64) 3 parts: "The Deadly Duo!", "The Downfall of Superman!", "The Hour of Kandor's Vengeance!"
#172 (10/64) "The Tyrant Superman!"
#200 (10/67) "Super-Brother Against Super-Brother!"

Superman's Girl-Friend, Lois Lane
#17 (5/60)
#44 (10/63)
#82

Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen
#86 (7/65) "The Team of Brainiac and Olsen!"
#87 (9/65) "The Arena of Doom"
#116 (12/68)
#130 (7/70)

World's Finest Comics
#144 (9/64) "The 1001 Tricks of Clayface and Brainiac!"
#158 (6/66) "The Invulnerable Super-Enemy!"
#164 (2/67) "Brainiac's Super Brain-Child!"

CBM readers, any additions or corrections would be greatly appreciated!

Inspiration Central

Subject: J.G. JONES

by Bill Baker

Editor's Note: Welcome to a regular new feature in CBM. Each issue we'll take a look at what inspired some of the greatest creators in comics to pursue their particular four-color careers. We'll be talking with Golden Age and Silver Age legends, and we'll also chat with today's creators, who were motivated by some of those same legends. Next month we'll feature Green Lantern creator Mart Nodell, but this month we'll start off with current sensation ***J.G. Jones****, who talks about the influence of numerous Silver Age artists including John Buscema and Gil Kane.*

After abandoning a burgeoning career as a "legitimate" artist and painter, J. G. Jones has effectively caught the attention of comic readers and his fellow professionals alike. Whether it's due to his lushly rendered figures and backgrounds, his dynamic layouts sporting crystal clear storytelling, or his eye-catching and evocative cover designs, he's rapidly become one of the more popular and respected artists working in the field today. In fact, he's become such a force in the industry that Grant Morrison, one of the most influential writers in the field today, not only personally picked Jones as the artist for the recent *Marvel Boy* miniseries, but has publicly stated that Jones is "one of the best comic artists ever" to work in the field. Jones took a few moments from penciling his current project, an original graphic novel featuring Batman and Wonder Woman, to discuss the work of those artists who exerted the greatest influence upon him when he was but a lad, growing up in the South.

CBM: *Who were some of your earliest influences, regarding comics? If I remember correctly, you've mentioned both John Buscema and Gil Kane in our past conversations.*

JONES: John Buscema was the first comic book artist, probably, that I really just relished each issue [he worked on]. I waited for everything he did, [and] I'd get pretty much whatever he drew, even if I didn't read the book regularly. I especially loved his *Avengers* run. Somebody from Marvel just sent me the black and white [*Essentials*] Avengers [trade paperback reprinting] that first John Buscema run. It's just great to see it all again. And, yeah, definitely Gil Kane, and Mr. Romita, Sr., together as a team on Spidey. I love the energy that Kane brought [to the work], and then the inks of John Romita just had a beautiful organic quality. Put those two together, and the old death of Gwen Stacey epic, [and you're talking about] a seminal event for a poor little kid from the backwoods. They killed my girlfriend, my comic book girlfriend.

CBM: *What about Buscema's work appealed to you? Was it, again, the organic quality of his style?*

JONES: He had really a lot of energy, and it was really clean. But it also had a real organic--I hate to use the term "realistic" because it wasn't--but there was a certain naturalism to the faces, [and a] naturalism to the movement. So, yeah, with Buscema I used to try and copy his women's faces, and the way he would do a pose, and pose the legs. I used to draw his Thor all the time.

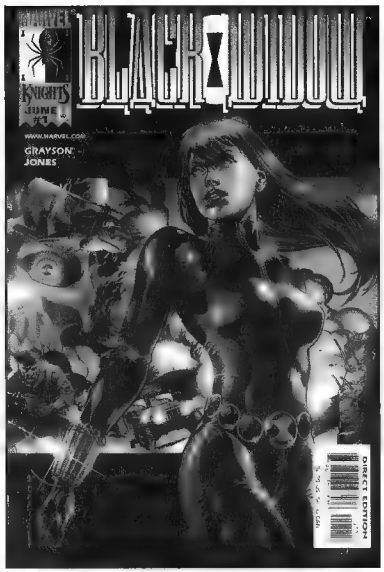
CBM: *How do those influences come out in your own work? Is it something that you're aware of any more, or has it all*

been subsumed in your own style and approach?

JONES: I think it's pretty much subsumed at this point. When I first started working in comics, I looked at too much stuff all the time. Ended up just freezing up. Too many influences, too much in my head, too much trying to think. Now… I look at a lot of stuff, but try not to look at it while I'm drawing.

But, occasionally, I do get stuck on a certain thing, and I can't figure out how to make a particular pose work, or the best storytelling thing for a particular shot. When I get stuck on stuff like that, as I sometimes do, I'll pull out some Alex Toth. That guy just always knows how to tell the story.

Instead of going for some drama shot that only causes confusion, because you wanted to draw a pretty picture, I try and tell the story first. Thinking about those old-school guys, they knew to do that.



CBM: *We've been talking about some pretty big guns so far. Are there any artists who influenced you that you feel don't get the kind of respect that they deserve?*

JONES: Ross Andru never gets the kind of credit he deserves. [He's] always forgotten. His run on [*Amazing*] *Spider-Man* I absolutely loved when I was a kid, and I tried to learn to draw from him. He had this really great, kinda quirky way of drawing Spider-Man where he's all gangly, and skinny, and muscular at the same time. Wiry. He has that same naturalism that drew me to Buscema's stuff. His background locations were completely believable, which I thought was a good fit with the Spider-Man character and soap opera [storylines], which was somehow more believable than some guy from Krypton who showed up here as a baby.

CBM: *The thing about Andru, which I've just realized, is that he effectively combined the classic Ditko look with Buscema's organic style on that book, didn't he?*

JONES: I think you're right. And I liked the way [Mike] Esposito inked it. It had a real solid quality to it. He never let you down.

CBM: *And he's another one who's also overlooked.*

JONES: Oh, absolutely. That guy was a hard worker. As far as any other influences in comics, does Frank Frazetta count?

CBM: *Absolutely.*

JONES: When I was trying to learn to draw comics, I also was trying to learn to paint. I would look at those old Ballantine editions [whose covers featured] Frank Frazetta plates. And, of course, I think it's pretty obvious that he's very organic, and influenced a lot of the way I try to draw, or tried to draw. I like the "browned-down" palette, the moody palette and light. That could also just be a matter of my tastes. Even when I was a fine arts painter, I tended towards a reddish-brown palette, or a tonal palette, and limiting the range of color. It might also have something to do with the distance I use in a lot of my panels. I was noticing the other day that I don't seem to do as many tight, close up shots as other people do on the page. Or [the typical] big, giant figures. I seem to let things happen at a distance. The camera's always placed back on Frazetta, so you get the whole scene.

Interested readers can find trade paperbacks of J. G. Jones' recent Marvel Comics efforts, Black Widow *and* Marvel Boy, *on the shelves of their local comic book stores. His work has also been collected in* Shi: Black, White and Red *from Crusade Entertainment.*

Bill Baker is a freelance journalist whose work appears frequently on the www.WizardWorld.com website, among others. His work can also be found in Fantastic Visions: The Art of Matt Busch, forthcoming from Avatar Press

Collectable Character Statues

by Mike Wilbur

Collectable character statues can be defined as 3-dimensional representations of fictional characters, produced for adults, for display or decorative purposes. They are moderate-to-high priced and constructed of fragile or delicate materials, and are, therefore, unsuitable as toys, or for handling by children. They are highly-detailed artistic renditions of our favorite characters from pictorial fiction. And, they're just plain cool to display and look at!

We're not talking G.I. Joes, or dolls, or action figures, or other mass-produced, mass-marketed, indistinguishable, interchangeable products here. We're talking hand-crafted, meticulously detailed, limited edition pieces of art, available from specialty retail outlets, that are sculpted to represent popular characters from comic books, sci-fi, movies, and television.

And what does that have to do with us, the readers and creators of *CBM*?

Plenty.

And why do we want to read about it?

Because we are the target audience for these products. Most of the statues produced since the birth of the market ten years ago depict the beloved characters of our youth; the heroes (and villains) we grew up with. They present an opportunity to see our childhood fantasies leap from the page in three vivid dimensions.

DC Comics was the first to get their feet wet. Their first release, in collaboration with **Graphitti Designs**, was sculptor **Randy Bowen**'s rendition of Neil Gaiman's Sandman, in 1991. Based on designs by **Kelley Jones**, the Sandman statue was a new kind of comic character collectible for a segment of the fan market traditionally ignored by comics publishers—adults.

The choice of subject was not arbitrary. With the intention of initiating an ongoing product line geared to a grown-up audience, DC selected the star of a hit comic book series that, itself, attracted an atypical reader demographic—adults who didn't otherwise read comics.

The Sandman statue was a hit, and was followed soon afterward by Batman, also sculpted by Bowen and designed by Jones. This too was a no-brainer, since Batman was DC's most popular individual character. And Batman the statue was an even bigger hit than Sandman. They were off and running. Superman came next, with sales bolstered by the statue's appearance as a regular prop on TV's *Seinfeld*. Batman's partner Robin followed, and the line kept growing.

After a couple of years, the marketing partnership with Graphitti was dissolved, and **DC Direct** was formed as the company's brand name for in-house non-print products.

DC Direct's product line eventually expanded beyond statues to include mass-market priced items such as action figures and PVC sets. Also introduced was a high-end line of props, life-size reproductions of weapons, equipment, and other items from the pages of the comics. Those, however, are a subject for a later column.

Graphitti Designs, however, did not retreat from that area of the marketplace just because the DC partnership ended.

Recognizing that there was indeed a

market for high-end comic-related products, Graphitti released a series of three statues based on EC Comics' infamous trio, **The Crypt-Keeper**, **The Vault-Keeper**, and **The Old Witch**. Other characters, from other publishers, followed.

Other players entered the field; sculptors who had previously worked in semi-obscurity for the Big Guys formed their own studios and production companies, and contracted their services to any publisher who didn't have the inclination or the resources to handle the laborious design and production process themselves.

Trailblazer Randy Bowen's studio Bowen Designs is currently devoting most of its energies to creating statues and busts of Marvel Comics characters.

Clayburn Moore and his studio **Moore Creations** have produced many statues and busts of Image Comics characters, as well as an assortment of pieces for various small publishers. They also produce a line of statues based on the fantasy artwork of Frank Frazetta, and a line of finely-sculpted snow-globes.

Modern Icons produces statues based on non-comic pop-culture figures, such as 1940's pin-up idol Betty Grable, infamous 1950's pin-up queen Bettie Page, and artist Norman Rockwell's World War II era archtype, Rosie the Riveter.

Hard Heroes' line of statues are based on the pulp-magazine creations of writer and Conan-creator Robert E. Howard. A new line of statues and busts based on characters from the popular animated series *Transformers* was recently initiated.

X-Plus Toys of Osaka, Japan is producing a line of statues based on the motion picture creatures of legendary stop-motion animator Ray Harryhausen, and another based on movie legend Godzilla and his monstrous allies and adversaries.

And the list goes on and on. In the months to come, I hope to discuss the works of all of these creators, and more, in this column. I hope you'll stick with me.

Collectable Character Statues—Market Report

To put the whole character statue picture in a different perspective, here's a sampling of recent prices realized from statue sales through the online auction service eBay. The secondary market for limited edition statues is on fire!

Name	Original Retail	Sale Price
Daredevil Red & Yellow Statues (Matching # set)	$300.00	$811.00
Thor Statue	$175.00	$411.00
Daredevil Yellow Statue	$150.00	$305.00
Cyclops Mini-Bust	$30.00	$285.00
Thor Mini-Bust	$50.00	$252.00
Daredevil Red Statue	$50.00	$241.00
Capt.America Modern Statue	$150.00	$213.00
Thing (Fantastic 4) Statue	$140.00	$185.00
Black Panther Mini-Bust	$30.00	$149.00

NEW & NOTEWORTHY

By J.C. Vaughn, Executive Editor

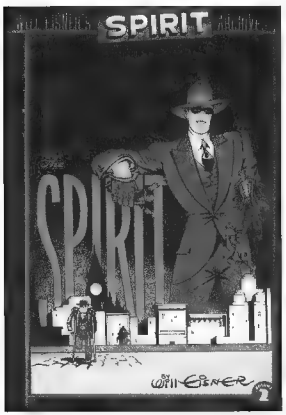
There's a series of standard complaints about today's comics. They're too violent. They're poorly written or poorly illustrated. They're all glitz and no substance. They're not written for kids. You know what? In many cases, a lot of those complaints are true. You know what else? In many cases they're not true. If you've got an open mind and are looking for enjoyment, there are still some new comics in your future.

This is not to suggest that if you like *Sugar & Spike* you should be reading *The Punisher*, but there is more diversity of product right now than there has ever been before, and there's probably a new comic or related item that you'd like. That goes for fans of the Golden Age, Silver Age or even the Bronze Age. Things are not perfect, but no one is being excluded from the fun.

DC ARCHIVES, TOYS KEEP ROLLING

In our next issue, *Comic Book Marketplace* #85, we're taking a new look at Will Eisner's classic creation, The Spirit. A lot of other readers are taking a look at The Spirit, too, in the form of DC's ***The Spirit Archives***. This includes young fans who have never known this historically important work before and more seasoned enthusiasts who are glad to have the series collected in such a nicely designed set. If you haven't picked up these volumes, you're missing out on history.

Speaking of history, how about the upcoming **statue** recreating the cover of *Detective Comics* #38? One of the most important moments of the Golden Age is made three-dimensional for fans of all ages. This can only help increase awareness of classic stories we should all treasure.

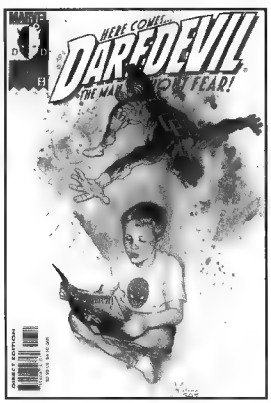


As we're working on documenting many of these comic character treasures for the fourth edition of *Hake's Price Guide To Character Toys*, I can't help but wonder how no one hit on this sooner. From the **Bottled City of Kandor** prop to the various ***Archives*** series to plush toys of **Bat-Mite** and **Krypto**, this is an incredible time to be a comics fan. DC Direct, DC's toy imprint, has also released great sets of **PVC figures** or individual **action figures** ranging from the **Justice Society of America** to **Alfred E. Newman**, and there always seem to be more on the way. (Many of the statues will be covered in more detail in the "Statues" column, by the way, so be sure to check it out!)

MARVEL – PART ONE: NEWSSTAND VARIANTS

Marvel has started issuing some of its current titles under different names for the newsstand, clearly testing the idea that perhaps the brand name "Marvel" carries more impact than the names of some their second or third tier characters as far as the general population is concerned.

For example, the recently released *Daredevil* #17 has also been released to the newsstand as ***Marvel Unlimited Featuring Daredevil*** (no number). The interiors and indicia are identical in the two editions. The cover image is the same, although it clearly was designed to compliment the *Daredevil* logo and not the substantially larger *Marvel Unlimited Featuring Daredevil* logo, much of which is actually obscured by the character.



Just how widespread this new practice is has yet to be documented, but the **ICV2** website (**www.icv2.com**) has reported that the numbering on at least one of these series gives cause to believe that this is not going to be a simple chase. Released as ***Citizen V*** #1 (the first issue in a three-issue mini-series) in the direct market, the same comic was issued as ***Marvel Universe*** #3 for newsstands. The obvious

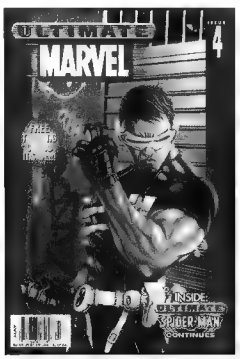
question is "What were the first two issues?" Depending on how successful this experiment is, collecting these variants could become a modern version of the cover price variants and develop into an interesting niche within our hobby.

If you've got any information on these, we'd like to hear from you. Drop Bob Overstreet and Mark Huesman at *The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* a line at **feedback@gemstonepub.com** or by mail at Gemstone Publishing, 1966 Greenspring Drive, Timonium, MD 21093. We'll continue to report on the findings.

MARVEL – PART TWO: MAGAZINES

Another interesting newsstand area Marvel has ventured into is **magazines.** While never the main thrust of their business, Marvel has produced some memorable series over the years, including *Planet of the Apes*, *Master of Kung-Fu*, and the *Savage Sword of Conan* (of course their earliest efforts were the *Spectacular Spider-Man magazines* in the late 60s). Now they've returned with two magazines, ***Ultimate Marvel Magazine*** and ***Marvel Knights Magazine***.

Ultimate Marvel Magazine features mainly reprint material from Marvel's recently launched **Ultimate** line and generally will include three issues worth of material comprised of one story each from *Ultimate Spider-Man*, *Ultimate X-Men* and *Ultimate Marvel Team-Up*. The reprint material is supplemented by new articles, interviews and editorial text.



Marvel Knights Magazine similarly features three stories from the **Marvel Knights** imprint, launching with *Daredevil*, *Black Widow* and *Punisher*, similarly supplemented.

The size of the magazines is 10 7/8" tall by 7 1/4" wide, and they retail for $3.99 each. Both are monthlies. One additional interesting note on them – the first three issues of *Ultimate Marvel Magazine* and the first issue of *Marvel Knights Magazine* were not distributed in the direct market. After fan and retailer complaints, Marvel changed their policy with the fourth and second issues, respectively.

MARVEL – PART THREE: OLD NUMBERING

Everything old is new again. For reasons logically understandable (sales) and emotionally aggravating, many of **Marvel's core titles** (*Amazing Spider-Man*, *Fantastic Four*, *Thor*, *The Avengers*, etc.) have started their numbering over, in some cases more than once, in the last five years. First it was the "Heroes Reborn" fiasco, then the well received "Heroes Return" and "Marvel Knights."

Now Marvel has found a way to honor the fans who've been at this a while and they're including the old numbering as well as the new numbering on the covers. The new numbers are larger, but now the older numbers will be easily discernable as well. They fit in nicely with Marvel's new trade dress.

TALES OF TERROR! – THE NOMINATIONS

Grant Geissman and Fred von Bernewitz's ***Tales of Terror: The EC Companion***, a stunning, comprehensive volume on the story of **EC Comics**, continues to receive accolades as a significant historical work. Co-published by **Gemstone** and **Fantagraphics Books** (please forgive the horn tooting and hyperbole if it becomes excessive, but this really is a deserving project!), this book is something no serious comics fan should be without.

Previously honored with two **Harvey Award nominations** ("Special Award For Excellence In Presentation" and "Best Biographical/Historical Presentation"), *Tales of Terror!* has added an **Eisner Award nomination** in the "Best Comics-Related Book" category to its list of credits.

It's available through Diamond Comic Distributors at your local comic book shop (if they don't stock it, they can order it – it's product **#STAR11041**), or you can order it direct from Gemstone by calling toll-free **(800) EC-CRYPT**. It's $39.95 (plus s&h, if you order direct), fits right next to your editions of *The Complete EC Library*, and is the best money you'll spend on comics history this year. There's also a deluxe, limited edition still available (at least at press time!) signed by many of the EC greats.

The Frazetta-Phile

Frank Frazetta: Public Citizen

by S.C. Ringgenberg

Greetings, fellow Frazetta aficionados, and welcome to the first installment of "The Frazetta-Phile," an ongoing column focusing on the work of the incomparable Frank Frazetta, one of the most successful and influential artists of the twentieth century. Thanks to your friendly editor, Russ Cochran, The Frazetta-Phile will be appearing periodically in *Comic Book Marketplace*. I'd like to use this series to explore some of the lesser-known or unexplored aspects of Frazetta's work as both a cartoonist and illustrator. Some columns will deal solely with Frazetta's comic book artwork, while others will explore his career as a newspaper cartoonist, movie poster artist, and paperback cover painter. I'd also like to tackle such ancillary topics as the dizzying variety of Frazetta merchandise that's been produced over the last three decades, and take a tour through the oeuvre of artists who've either been 'inspired' by Frazetta, or simply performed coldly calculated rip-offs of specific images because of tight deadlines, laziness, lack of talent, or misguided hero worship.*

At some point in the near future, I hope to collect these articles and a few others I've written into a book for serious Frazetta collectors that would include a comprehensive listing of Frazetta's work in every medium, including an up-to-date rundown of Frazetta collectibles.

Now, on to the heart of the matter. Once upon a time up until the late 60s, comic books used to run public service advertising in order to combat the impression of many parents and teachers that they were worthless trash. These ads encouraged their young readers to be good citizens and engage in wholesome activities like joining the Boy Scouts, attending church, staying away from drugs, deploring racial prejudice, etc.

It may come as a surprise to those who know Frank Frazetta's work only from his paintings to learn that beginning in the early 50s he did a handful of public service comic strips. He drew his last one in the mid-60s, just as his painting career was taking him away from the low-rent world of comics forever. These public service strips constitute a tiny but interesting body of work that includes one of only two† complete comic books Frazetta illustrated, and one of the very last pieces of sequential art he ever did.

These ads ran in comics put out by Hillman, Eastern Color Publishing, and Lev Gleason, in titles such as *Heroic Comics, Boy, Daredevil, Famous Funnies, Buster Crabbe*, etc. They all date from around 1952, the same time when Frazetta was contributing to DC, EC, Magazine Enterprises, and drawing his short-lived *Johnny Comet/Ace McCoy* newspaper strip (which ran from 1/28/52 through 2/1/53).

One way in which it's interesting to analyze Frazetta's public service ads is to look at them in terms of the characters Frazetta drew for each one compared to the rest of his output at the time. Probably the silliest ad to modern audiences is "Prayer Works Wonders." The title of this strip might lead you to expect it to show how prayer helps people deal with life's vicissitudes. However, this is not the case. "Prayer" features a young man unlucky in love

Prayer Works Wonders
LATER...
ATTEND THE CHURCH OR SYNAGOGUE OF YOUR CHOICE...
IN COOPERATION WITH RELIGION IN AMERICAN LIFE...

How I wanted to be part of the town again--to laugh and be gaily alive. But I heard the steamer docking and dashed to the wharf just as Bart debarked from his boat...
IT'S ME, BART--KATHY! I'M HOME. OHHH-- HOW I'VE MISSED YOU.
KATHY--I-- I--HARDLY RECOGNIZED YOU.

(right) One of Frazetta's male protagonists from an Untamed Love romance strip

who is advised by his mother that the best way to get girls is to take them to church. The strip's strapping young protagonist is a handsome blond fellow, who wouldn't have looked out of place in one of the romance comics Frazetta did around the same time for titles such as *Personal Love* and *Movie Love*.

"We Can Stop the Enemies of Youth," Frazetta's anti-drug ad, ran in *Heroic Comics, Buster Crabbe, Boy, Daredevil*, and other titles. The drug pusher in "We Can Stop the Enemies of Youth" looks like one of the generic hoodlums Frazetta put in his *Shining Knight* strips for DC (1950-51), or one of the snap brim-hatted gangsters who infested his *Johnny Comet* syndicated strip. The drug-addicted teenager in "Enemies" is an interesting departure from the clean-cut teens that generally inhabited Frazetta's comic strips and comic book pages. The one full-face view of him shows a memorably haunted expression. Frazetta's use of a high angle in the first panel, combined with the drug addict's slumped posture and physical isolation from the wholesome teens in the last panel successfully evokes the loneliness and alienation so prevalent in the drug culture.

WE CAN STOP
the ENEMIES of YOUTH
HE'S A DOPE FIEND! WE'D BETTER KEEP AWAY FROM HIM!
THE DOPE MENACE IS INJURING OUR YOUTH!... GIRLS AND YOUNG MEN ARE ROBBED OF THEIR RIGHT TO HAPPINESS BY CRUEL, AND DANGEROUS CHARACTERS WHO INDUCE THEM TO FALL PREY TO DOPE!... ALL YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN SHOULD REPORT DOPE PEDDLERS TO THEIR PARENTS, THEIR CLERGYMEN, THEIR TEACHERS, THE POLICE, OR THE NEAREST SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCY... THE COMICS MAGAZINE INDUSTRY PLEDGES ITSELF TO AID YOUNGSTERS IN THEIR FIGHT AGAINST THE ENEMIES OF YOUTH— THE DOPE PEDDLERS...
PREPARED THROUGH THE COOPERATION OF NEW YORK CITY YOUTH BOARD AND THE ASSOCIATION OF COMICS MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS...

(Right) A typical gangster from Frazetta's first year on Johnny Comet

In our cynical, media-savvy new millennium it's easy to snicker at dialog like, "Stay away from him, fellows, he's a dope fiend!" However, drug abuse among the young is a problem that's still with us, and it's markedly worse today than it was in the 50s. Oddly enough, "We Can Stop the Enemies of Youth" was reprinted as late as 1970 in *Murder Tales* (Vol. 1, #10), a black and white magazine that featured crime comics. Although old-fashioned, "Enemies" is still an effective piece of propaganda.

With his propensity for both horror and graphic violence, one wonders what kind of anti-drug strip Frazetta could have come up with had he been given both better material and a longer script to illustrate. Take a moment and imagine Frazetta illustrating Al Feldstein's anti-drug script for the harrowing tale "The Monkey" (*Shock SuspenStories* #12, January, 1953; Frazetta's art on "Squeeze Play" appeared in the next issue). If you've never read it, "The Monkey" is a powerful story of one teenager's snowballing obsession with drugs, starting with pot, which leads him to try amphetamines and barbiturates, and ultimately leads to heroin addiction. At the story's climax, the teen's father finds his 'fit,' the box containing his syringe, rubber tubing, and other paraphernalia, and won't give it to his junkie son. In a withdrawal-fueled frenzy, the son savagely beats his father, unknowingly killing him. In Frazetta's hands, this same script would've been an even more effective bit of anti-drug propaganda. (By the way, this is not meant to denigrate the work of Joe Orlando, the actual artist on "The Monkey." Orlando did a superb job.)

"Boy Scout Jamboree," which ran in *Heroic Comics* and *Famous Funnies*, is a simple plug for attending the 1953 Jamboree. The clean-cut Scouts in the "Boy Scout Jamboree" ad (all Caucasians) look as though they stepped from the pages of one of Frazetta's *Heroic Comics* true-life adventures from the early 1950s. This well designed, if unspectacular, strip highlights Frazetta's ability to draw anything and make it visually interesting. The wagon train in the center of the composition probably came easily to Frazetta, as he was drawing a lot of oaters in the early 50s for *John Wayne, Jimmy Wakely, Billy the Kid, Tim Holt* and other western titles.

Another of Frazetta's public service strips, "Red Cross New Method of Artificial Respiration" (*Heroic Comics* #72) is of interest in that it overlaps into TWO areas of Frazettania: public service strips, and Buster Crabbe comic art. In passing, I should mention that Frazetta did a number of depictions of Buster Crabbe. He drew the handsome serial star for the covers of *Buster Crabbe Comics* #4 and 5, and various other places often enough to earn the moniker "the Buster Crabbe drawer of all time" among the Fleagle gang that consisted of Frazetta, Al Williamson, Roy Krenkel, Angelo Torres, George Woodbridge and Nick Meglin. The 1-page "Red Cross" strip features a cowboy-hatted photo of Buster Crabbe's grinning countenance above four panels of art in which the former Olympic

champion swimmer demonstrates how to resuscitate a drowning victim.

Frazetta's biggest public service project was undoubtedly *Li'l Abner and the Creatures From Drop-Outer Space*, a 16-page comic book given away by the Job Corps. *Creatures* came about because of Frazetta's association with Al Capp. He worked as an assistant to Al Capp on *Li'l Abner* from 1955 through 1961, approximately seven years. Accounts of the length of Frazetta's tenure on the strip vary, with Capp saying that Frazetta worked for him for only a few months, while Frazetta states that it was at least seven years. Personally, given what my research has unearthed about Capp's personality and veracity on other issues, I believe Frazetta. According to Frazetta's later accounts in interviews, he mostly penciled Sunday pages, though a great many dailies from this period show evidence of Frazetta's excellent draftsmanship. A careful examination of the *Abner* strips from this period shows Frazetta's hand in the strong design within individual panels, the beautiful women (in my opinion, Daisy Mae never looked more voluptuous than when Frazetta drew her), and occasionally lush outdoor backgrounds. Frazetta's long tenure on Abner and its effect on his style will certainly provide grist for a future column.

For his work in Capp's shop Frazetta earned $150 a week, a pretty good living back in the 1950s, especially when you consider that Frazetta could pencil a Sunday page in about a day and a half. This left him the rest of the week for the really important stuff like chasing girls, going to the movies and otherwise goofing off with the Fleagles, riding his 47 Harley and smacking baseballs over the outfield fence.

Creatures is not a typical comic, in that it's only half the length of a standard comic, and the pages contain only one to three panels each. In other ways, it's very typical of Frazetta's output during the *Abner* period. Sloppy Belle, the voluptuous but unkempt redheaded slattern who tries to discourage protagonist Danny Driftwood from seeking gainful employment, is a prototypical Al Capp-style female, and can be seen as a sister under the skin to Capp's beautiful but odiferous Moonbeam McSwine. Copies of *Creatures* are not too hard to find in decent condition even today, and some still contain the tear-out postcard for contacting the Job Corps. With Frazetta joining Capp's crew in 1955, fresh from the comic book trenches, it's not hard to imagine how he got the assignment. *Creatures* gives Frazetta the opportunity to show off his facility at aping Capp's style, and at drawing pretty girls, something at which he's excelled for his entire career.

The anti-smoking ad "Easy Way to a Tuff Surfboard" (the only other strip Frazetta did that was remotely similar to "Enemies of Youth") was written by Warren Magazines' then-editor, Archie Goodwin. Commissioned by publisher Jim Warren, "Surfboard" was executed in the slick ink wash style Frazetta used on "Werewolf" (*Creepy* #1) and on the two "Loathsome Lore" pages he did for *Creepy* (#s 2 and 7). This half-page ad is arguably the most beautifully illustrated public service comic strip anyone ever did. As an added bonus for fans of the Frazetta Woman, the strip boasts a curvy bikini-clad beauty (the girlfriend of the anti-smoking surfer). This strip implies, of course, that the nerdy caricatured smokers couldn't possibly hang with such a beauteous babe if they kept smoking, to say nothing of acquiring a 'tuff' surfboard like the one toted by the strip's wholesome protagonist. This strip originally appeared in *Eerie* #3 in 1966, and was reprinted about a dozen times in various issues of *Creepy, Eerie* and Warren's non-comics fright film mags, *Famous Monsters of Filmland* and *Monster World.*

The curvy surfer girl from "Easy Way to a Tuff Surfboard" also gives a hint of what Frazetta's comic book

RED CROSS NEW METHOD OF ARTIFICIAL RESPIRATION
HE CAUGHT IT! NICE GOING LEON! THAT WAS SOME TOSS!
HOLD TIGHT! TEDDY, WE'LL PULL YOU TO SHORE!

(Right) Some young boys from Heroic Comics show Boy Scout-like resourcefulness to rescue an imperiled youngster

women would have looked like had he continued doing sequential art through the 60s and beyond. In fact, this strip, along with "Werewolf" (*Creepy* #1), his two "Loathsome Lore" pages (*Creepy* #s 2 and 7), and some panels from Kurtzman and Elder's "Little Annie Fanny" (circa 1965) are the last sequential art Frazetta ever did. Frazetta would go on to paint some covers for *National Lampoon* and draw one interior cover for *Dragula*, a parody vampire strip, in the 1970s, but then ignored the comics field until the 90s. However, upon Frazetta's 'return' to comics, his contributions were very limited. Original paintings were featured on the covers of *Heavy Metal, Penthouse Comix*, and *Verotika*, and some reprinted and reworked existing paintings were used as covers for Verotik's line of titles based on his characters (*Death Dealer* and *Jaguar God*). He also contributed original illustrations for the covers or back covers to the comics *Last of the Viking Heroes* and *Madman*, and licensed a few old paintings to be used as covers for some reprint anthologies that included old stories by Frazetta, though he did no new comic pages for any of these titles.

Ironically, throughout the late 60s into the present, comics fans have continued to regard Frazetta as one of their own. A great many fanzines published in the 60s and 70s contained unauthorized reprints of Frazetta's comics work, with his *Thun'da, Famous Funnies* covers, and "White Indian" strips among his most often reprinted works. However, as stated previously, after the mid-60s, Frazetta would never draw another page of comic book art.

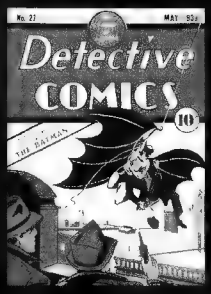
EASY WAY TO A TUFF SURFBOARD!
HEY! LOOK WHO'S RIDIN' THE BIG ONE... IN TANDEM! IT'S DAVE!
WHAT'S HAPPENING?! LAST TIME I SAW HIM, HE WAS A BOARDLESS MOPAD LIKE YOU AND ME!
WHAT GIVES, CUT-BUDDY? HOW'D YOU DIG UP THE COINS FOR THIS MEAN HUNK OF WOOD?
A CUSTOM JOB! AND I'M DOING WELL TO KEEP MYSELF IN SMOKES!
IF YOU THINK IT LOOKS GOOD, WAIT'LL YOU TRY IT!
NOT NOW, DAD! TOO WINDED FROM THE SMOKE... I'D DO WELL TO PADDLE OUT THROUGH THE BREAKERS!
YOU'D DO WELL TO QUIT BURNING UP YOUR POCKET MONEY ON CIGARETTES! I DID AND BANKED THE CASH INSTEAD... YOU'RE LOOKIN' AT WHAT IT GOT ME!
...AND, MAN, I NEVER GET WINDED NOW!
MAKES SENSE! I'D TRADE A SMOKER'S COUGH FOR A BOARD LIKE THAT! LET'S GIVE IT A TRY! MAYBE IN A FEW MONTHS...
SMOKING DOESN'T PAY!
5 CIGARETTES A DAY COST $32 OR MORE A YEAR!
10 CIGARETTES A DAY COST $64 OR MORE A YEAR!
20 CIGARETTES A DAY COST $128 OR MORE A YEAR!
WHY RISK YOUR HEALTH FOR CIGARETTES?

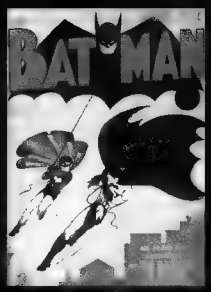
"Easy Way to a Tuff Surfboard" is possibly Frazetta's last piece of sequential art

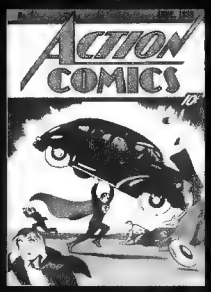
*Note: If any of you readers have some choice Frazetta swipes, make me a copy and pass 'em on. Please include as much information as possible about where and when each swipe appeared. Any contributions that are used will be acknowledged in a future installment of the Frazetta-Phile.

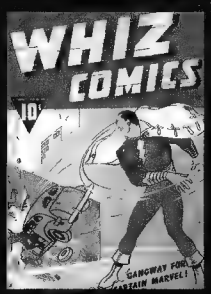
†This does not include the three White Indian *(White Indian* #11-13) collections put out by Magazine Enterprises since these comics are reprints, not original work.3.

S. C. Ringgenberg is a life-long Frank Frazetta fan. He has been writing about Frazetta, EC Comics and other aspects of American popular culture since becoming a professional writer in 1980









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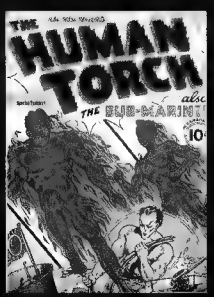

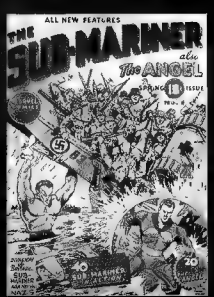

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The Michael Naiman Report

Volatile Variants...

Comic Con International: San Diego is just around the corner and—if you can believe it—the show will be bigger than ever! The ComicCon will be the first group to utilize a portion of the expanded center. The show has expanded into Hall D which measures 58,725 square feet. As if a person didn't have enough shopping choices with the existing 250,000 square feet! Beth Holley, VP of Exhibits, has once again outdone herself! Hope she has a new pair of roller blades! This year's show will feature an "Early Bird Shopping Special" on Wednesday night for those folks having purchased advance 4-day passes.

Collector Alert! For those collectors who remember the Marvel File Copy swindle of a few years back, the same "reputable" dealer who brought you those "classic pedigreed books" is back in cyberspace with more of the trimmed, color touched and doctored beauties you know so well! After previously being run out of the comic business, he's surfaced again and is taking advantage of unknowledgeable e-comic collectors. After they buy his "high grade" books, many have sent them off to CGC in hopes of pyramiding their profits. To add insult to injury, he conducts "private auctions" so that no one knows who is being swindled and hence, cannot communicate with each other! Fortunately, CGC's eagle-eyed restoration department has detected this scam. What's a person to do? Report the seller to the US Postal Service and eBay. Mail fraud is still a crime!

What would my report be without my yearly examination and opinions about the "new" Overstreet Price Guide? The best improvement in the last 25 years has come about with the introduction of the Big, Big Guide. Spiral bound, double sized and lacking the advertising, this is the type of innovation that the hobby has long awaited! Easy to use, easy to read! It lays open flat—and it is hard to lose!

This year's Guide has reacted to the marketplace sales convulsions caused by the grading service. Prices in the NM range have jumped significantly on many titles. What I cannot understand is that even many Disney titles were increased. Many of you know that I am a hardcore Disney collector. I have seen absolutely no market support to validate these across-the-board Disney price increases.Where's the sales data and who's providing it?

Just a thought: Since I am a card carrying carnivore and charter member of PETA (People for Eating Tasty Animals), is it proper for vegetarian dealers to buy, sell and trade funny animal books?

On another collecting front, I feel that there is room to move upward with just about any of those hard-to-find, structurally appealing, squarebound books. Whether they are Dell, Gold Key, Tower, Harvey, Fox, Ziff Davis or your mainline Marvel and DC, if you can find an example with nicely centered spine printing, unbumped spine areas, full gloss and nice page quality—grab them quickly!

Many collectors have questioned the current Guide listings for what we call "Price Variant" books. Researcher Jon McClure reports, "The 'variant market' is not only surprisingly healthy, but selling from one side of the country to the other and in Canada! Everyone I contacted was surprised or dismayed that guide value for variants has been dropped in valuation. I don't offer advice to Overstreet about material I don't deal in or am not familiar with, and I wish others would exercise the same prudent approach. This will bring about greater accuracy in the Price Guide. It seems that decent looking reading copies of average titles bring about $20 each.

"Iron Fist #14 has sold twice for $1900 in VF grade, and I believe a NM 9.4 would bring considerably more if it exists. I know of only five copies in existence and the best one is CGC 9.0 VF/NM. Considering that slabbed books have nothing to do with reality, could a slabbed Iron Fist #14 fetch $3000?

"Variants are averaging five times Guide for good titles, and premiums of 10-20 times Guide for high grade, particularly for key and scarce books, like the horror and western titles, especially Kid Colt 207-08, Mighty Marvel Western #45, and Weird Wonder Tales #15.

Doug Sulipa of Comic World (Canada) reports, "Dealers who claim they can't sell variants should drop their prices from 20 times Guide to 10 times Guide! Reprint variants of Modern Comics, Whitman DC reprints and Gold Key Whitman reprints all sell at 150-250% Guide!" Reported sales include: Amazing Spiderman #155 F $50; Eternals #1 FN $20; Marvel Feature #4 VG/F $20.

David Alexander from Florida says, "I have sold every variant I have made available for an average of five times Guide—sometimes higher! I get $10 each for Charlton Modern Comics reprints in VG with no objections, because the last guy said he'd rather pay $10 now than make 25 more phone calls and spend more time and money. I could probably ask $15 or $20 for the same material, just because they want the book! Condition isn't the issue. When I asked my customer why he thought dealers would advise Bob to drop values, he responded 'Some dealers just don't care for material until they have some, and when they talk their customers into buying, suddenly it becomes a desirable item!'"

T. J. Pitts of Crazy Frog Comics tells me, "I was surprised to see the Guide value fall the way it did on the variants. I can get $50 for a GD- copy of Marvel Tales #58 just because it's impossible to get a hold of. Using an original owner collection as my resource base, I know that no July 1976 variants were released here in San Antonio, Texas, because the owner bought absolutely everything, including titles like Night Nurse and Strange Sports Stories, from 1966-88, and the July issues weren't in there. Variants are in very high demand. Last year's eBay sales were $250 for regular comics and $6000 in variant sales! Of 600 variants I

purchased last year, only two were 35-cent variants, and the others were all 30-centers."

Dan Cusimano reports, "The new Guide values are extremely out of line with reality. Just off the top of my head these books have just recently sold: Avengers #146-48, #150(set of four in FN) $40; Daredevil #134 VF $15; Fantastic Four #169 VF/NM $15; Marvel Super Heroes #57 VG $11; Marvel Tales #68 VG/FN $30; Planet Of The Apes #5 NM $111; X-Men #100 FN/FN+ $150.

And, finally, collector Bill Alexander let me know that "...Last year I sold a pair of variant 60-cent cover editions of Marvel's Gothic Tales of Romance for $250 in NM. The Guide had them listed for $1.80!"

This certainly sheds a different light on the valuation of variants, eh? I am always looking for information, hot sales info, industry news and market reports. Please feel free to email me at mnaiman1@home.com. Until next time!

MARKET REPORTS

MICHAEL TIERNEY
THE COMIC BOOK STORE

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A couple of years ago, Steve Geppi said something at the Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide Advisor's gathering in Timonium that made a lot of sense. About the aggravation with **Marvel Comics** being loudly expressed by so many retailers, Steve observed, and this is not an exact quote, that ours is a crazy industry unlike any other—could we imagine going into Sears to buy an appliance and have the salesman complain about 'That DAMN Kenmore company.'

It's a shame that Marvel's current President, Bill Jemas, has not learned that lesson. Public comments about retailers needing to take IQ tests serves to erode consumer confidence.

All this has been reflected in my sales of back issues. **Silver Age Marvels** are only moving in high grade when the price point is below $25. I purchased a beautiful copy of Amazing Spider-Man #100 that I valued at $150. When there was no interest in the stores, I offered it for auction on eBay and was glad that I set a reserve price when the bidding ended at $33. I did eventually move the book at $130.

Other examples of Marvel sales: Fantastic Four #50 GD $23, #52 (first Black Panther) VG $19, #55 GD+ $12, and a dozen other #70s in Good for $3 - $5 each. Journey Into Mystery #99 GD $10; Hulk #105 VF $19, Sub-Mariner #8 (versus Thing) VF+ $23; Amazing Spider-Man #289 M $20, #276 M $9.75, #275 MT $6.75. We picked up a few other early high grade Spider-Man, but customers were even balking at $35 for Annual #4.

Contrastly, **Silver Age DC** comics in high grade are moving fast—especially War and Western comics. Comics that were fifty-cent turkeys in the Eighties are now moving for 20 times more.

In modern back issue sales, **CrossGen** has figured out how to flow with the marketplace: ready availability of reorders. We are moving every series briskly at $3.50 for first issues and $3.25 for all subsequent back issues.

Then there is **Manga**. While older issues are scarce, the demand is growing every day. Dark Horse made a good move to take advantage of the lack of color in this market when they re-released Dirty Pair: Sim Hell in full-color. The first issue reprint sold more in one day than the original release did in two months.

The effect of **graphic novels** on sales: there are customers who will not buy new issues and will only wait for the collection.

When attending a retailer conference back in the mid-Eighties, I showed representatives from Marvel and DC runs of comics I had bound into hard covers. Collections of Ronin, etc., sold as fast as I could assemble sets. The reps were unimpressed and certain that the mass market had no interest in graphic novels. Then came Frank Miller's Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, which remains today as the perennial best-selling graphic novel.

The effects of the **Internet**? We auctioned two copies of Steve Zodiac and the Fireball XL-5 in VG+ that had sat in the stores at $5 each for ten years. The bidding ended at $15 and $17. When you are based in a rural, sparsely populated state like I am, this is a great new tool. Doomsayers have cautioned that this is an arena where your own customers can become your competition. Remember how it was predicted that certain "now defunct" e-tailers would account for a substantial percentage of new comic sales by 2001?

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For the first time in several years, **Overstreet** raised prices significantly. Gold and Silver Age went up about 20% across the board. Key books are up an average of 30-50%.The New X-Men keys (X-Men #94, GS X-Men #1, Hulk #181) doubled. Wow!

I would have much preferred a general increase of 5-10%, with selective titles being raised a little more. Certainly sales from the last year indicate the Near Mint prices are still understated. However, those record sales are usually for CGC graded, NM 9.4, or higher books. These books are usually rare, and on many GA books, unique.

It was proposed to make VF/NM "top of the Guide," but the idea was eventually scrapped. I was in favor. True **NM** books are so **scarce**, and the demand so great, it is difficult, if not impossible, to accurately reflect their values in the Guide anymore.

The greater problem these increases create is the over-valuing of VF books. According to Overstreet, Giant-Size X-Men #1 is worth $550 in VF. The book trades at $300-$400 in that grade.

With the wealth of information available, there are few secrets Buyers and sellers can find good reference through **eBay** results and published auction results. In general, prices have softened a bit. I am not alarmed by this. I don't think we've seen the last round of price escalation for high grade comics. I feel the shrewd

CBM MarketWatch

A report of market indicator sales (including % of Guide) by Michael Naiman

All American Men of War
#6 VG $45 73%

Amazing Adventures
#36 (30¢ var.) NM $27 1.93X
#37 (30¢ var.) NM $27 1.93X

Amazing Fantasy
#15 FN/VF $6,600 81%

Amazing Spider-Man
#8 NM $2,850 2.71X
#155 (30¢ var.) VG+ $22 4.4X
#156 (30¢ var.) VF $16 1.03X
#157 (30¢ var.) FN- $20 2.66X

Astonishing Tales
#35 (30¢ var.) NM $27 2.25X
#36 (30¢ var.) VF+ $25 3.27X

Avengers
#1 AppVF $1,100 57%
#1 VF $690 36%
#1 VG $315 74%
#2 VF $375 82%
#2 VG+ $97 90%
#4 FN- $355 83%
#4 GD+ $100 70%
#51 VF $12.50 64%
#54 VF $15 77%
#61 VF $10 59%
#62 NM $19.50 75%
#64 VF $10 60%
#65 NM $16 62%

Batman
#45 VG $150 95%
#132 FN $76 1.33X
#181 VF $90 83%

Brave and Bold
#80 NM $59 1.08X
#83 NM $46 96%
#84 NM $66 1.37X

Captain America
#44 VG $275 87%
#70 VG- $510 1.52X
#101 NM $59 91%
#102 NM $35.50 89%
#103 NM $40 Guide
#104 NM $61 1.53X
#106 NM $41 1.02X
#107 VF+ $22 86%
#110 NM $155 2.38X
#112 VF $27 1.18X
#115 VF $10 62%
#116 NM $37 1.85X
#117 VF $45 1.29X
#119 NM $20 Guide

Champions
#1 VF $8.50 71%

Conan
#61 (30¢ var.) VF $14 3.33X
#62 (30¢ var.) FN $8 3.33X

Daredevil
#1 NM- $2,400 1.04X
#1 VF+ $765 55%
#1 GD+ $230 1.49X
#6 VF $90 95%

Defenders
#2 NM $36 1.03X

Detective
#472 NM $26 1.18X
#473 NM $20 91%
#474 NM $19 86%
#476 NM $41 1.08X

Dynamic
#11 VG $235 2.67X

Fantastic Four
#49 VF $130 73%
#51 VF $36 Guide
#58 FN++ $10 53%
#64 NM $65 1.30X

Flash
#106 VG $122 47%
#108 VG+ $87 76%
#119 VF $90 59%

Green Lantern
#1 VG $305 71%
#1 GD+ $123 57%
#2 VG $72 61%
#10 VG- $49 1.08X%
#35 VF $25 37%
#72 VF $10 51%
#76 VF $130 1.02X

House of Mystery
#147 NM- $25 35%
#180 NM $39 98%
#189 NM $40 2X%
#194 NM $31 1.1X%
#195 NM $48 1.2X

House of Secrets
#84 NM $37 1.23X
#85 NM $51 1.42X
#96 NM $34 1.36X

Incredible Hulk
#103 VF+ $76 1.33X
#104 VF+ $36 62%
#105 VF $31 75%
#200 (30¢ var.) FN $32 3.28X

Inhumans
#6 (30¢ var.) VF $19 3.09X

Invaders
#6 (30¢ var.) VF $30 4.88X

Iron Man
#1 VG $77 96%
#1 VG $56 70%
#2 FN $41 34%
#16 VF $11 68%
#27 VF $11 92%
#29 VF $16 1.33X
#30 VF $10 83%

Jimmy Olson
#11 VF $355 2.15X

Journey into Mystery
#83 FN/VF $1,350 76%
#113 FN++ $16.66 72%
#114 FN++ $16.66 72%
#115 VF $48 69%
#116 VF $31 57%

Little Lulu
#35 VG $38 1.63X
#81 VG+ $28 2.40X

Lois Lane
#7 GD+ $25 76%
#8 GD+ $25 86%

Marvel Chillers
#6 (30¢ var.) NM $44 4.89X

Marvel Feature
#4 (30¢ var.) NM $14 2.33X

Marvel Spotlight
#5 NM $77 77%

Omega
#9 (35¢ var.) VG $30 1.5X

Phantom Stranger
#11 NM $20 87%
#16 NM $26 1.04X
#17 NM $20 80%

Shadow (1973)
#1 NM $39 1.39X

Showcase
#80 VF $27 71%

Son of Satan
#4 (30¢ var.) VF $32 2.66X
#5 (30¢ var.) NM $45 2.5X

Space Ghost
#1 NM- $200 50%

Spectacular Spider-Man
#8 (35¢ var.) GD+ $27 1.8X
#9 (35¢ var.) FN $41 13.66X
#10 (35¢ var.) FN $41 13.66X
#11 (35¢ var.) VG+ $34 1.7X

Spectre (1st series)
#1 FN+ $21 64%
#2 NM $75 63%
#3 NM $75 94%

Star Wars
#4 (35¢ var.) FN+ $420 34X
#4 (35¢ var.) FN- $190 15.44X

Strange Adventures
#207 NM $55 92%
#208 NM $50 83%
#209 NM $50 83%
#211 NM $31 69%
#212 NM $49 1.08X
#213 NM $33 73%
#215 VF $20 70%
#216 NM $36 80%

Superman
#7 VG- $308 51%
#53 FN $500 61%
#100 GD+ $180 90%

Swamp Thing
#2 NM $52 1.16X
#3 NM $33 1.1X
#7 NM $90 3X

Tales of Suspense
#39 VF $1,700 44%

Turok
#1(FC596) VG+ $100 86%

Two-Gun Kid
#129 (30¢ var.) VF $45 4.68X

Uncle Scrooge
#9 (Poughkeepsie) NM $360 2X

Wonder Woman
#117 VG- $44 1.47X
#122 VG $46 2.09X
#200 FN $43 3.5X

X-Men
#1 FN+ $1,550 93%
#44 VF $50 98%
#56 NM $75 Guide
#99 (30¢ var.) VG $61 2.28X
#99 (30¢ var.) VF $72 76%
#106 (35¢ var.) FN $150 7.32X

investor/collector can find a lot of bargains now. Especially in CGC graded books in the 8.5 to 9.2 range.

Sales are still very steady. **High grade DCs** (all titles) are selling very well for me. Marvels with good eye appeal, but priced at Guide or slightly less, are solid. Marvel keys, in all grades, are difficult to keep in stock. High grade Golden Age has slowed down for me. Demand has shifted to Fiction House, Dell and other less expensive publishers. Low and midgrade sales are still very good.

On April 29th, 2000, **Greg Manning Auctions** held their first auction featuring CGC graded material. The record prices realized (and being realized) are often staggering. Sure, many of my books that have sat unsold for a long time sold at 3x-4x my sticker price when I had them slabbed, but they are gone now. I generally can't replace my NM inventory at the prices demanded by sellers. This does not benefit me. They do a credible job grading. They are meticulous in finding restoration. It is my opinion that CGC graded books provide much more liquidity to the collector when selling.

Recent sales: Action #76 (Mile High) CGC 9.6 $5,200, Amazing Spider-Man #37 CGC 9.0 $152, Aquaman #1 CGC 9.2 $1,500, All Select #1 VG $2,000, Brave and Bold #3 CGC 8.5 $575, Fantastic Four #59 CGC 9.4 $245, Justice League of America #9 VF+ $275, Marvel Team-Up #15 CGC 9.4 $62, Master #25 (Mile High) NM-/NM $4,700, Melvin Monster #1 CGC 9.6 $273, Sgt. Fury #13 NM- $400, Tomahawk #1 VG/F $350, Wambi #2 (Mile High) NM $2,100, X-Men #23 NM $265

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The **Internet** has been so widely accepted, that I started selling my personal collection, because prices are so consistent. Not necessarily high or low, but comics are selling through. We have made **lots of CGC referrals** and are getting positive reaction from even the most diehard collectors. I've heard way too many "It was NM until I put it back in the mylar..."

Internet sales will sharpen, probably falling for those with FN copies of material, as the line divides further between the readers and investors. That "Retirement Collection" would probably have to be sold before the end of next year, to retain any significant value for mid-range grades.

Some **recent sales:** Batman #158 CGC 8.5 VF $66; DC Super heroes Paperback Box Set (1978) featuring Wonder Woman, Superman, The Justice League of America, Batman, The World's Finest, and Superboy & The Legion of Super Heroes: All Avg VF+, slipcase VF also $200.00; Green Arrow (new) #1 (1st) $10; Hulk #104 FN $35; Marvel Illustrated Books (paperback): The X-Men (rep. #GS 1, and #117) NM $30; Preacher #51 (100 Bullets preview) $15; Planet of the Apes Magazine #1 NM $60.00, #1 VG $8.50; Savage Sword of Conan Magazine #1 NM $120; Sin City Signed/Numbered Ed with Slipcase $206; Sin City: A Dame to Kill For S/N w/Slipcase $65; Spawn #1 CGC 9.6 NM $202 trade; X-Men (Uncanny #114+) # 95 through #142 Avg FN (125-140 NM) $1,000 Trade.

JAMIE NEWBOLD /GINO SIRAGUSA
SOCAL COMICS

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Bronze Age to **Modern Age** comics, and those ubiquitous **Silver Age keys**: Sales in these areas are moderate for us, and in all grades. The grades still determine the amount of discount necessary to move common comics from the last 35 years. No surprises, we fully expect to continue **discounting Silver and Bronze age** comics graded below VF in 90% of the titles we sell. But, they are selling.

The past few years have seen a lot of rhetoric about the lack of **mobility of comics** not considered to be sound investments. Mid-grade comics from the last 35 years have commonly been the target of this purchase prejudice. We have quietly sold mid-grade DCs and Marvels with cover prices of 12-35 cents for the last two years in a variety of venues with discounts ranging from 0-50%. The only challenging venues for full Guide are the Internet auction sites. The sellers on **eBay** offer much of the same material retailers sell. They compete directly with much of the stock we sell priced at full Overstreet Guide. That's the downside. The upside brings the realization that those self-same on-line auctioneers can only sell an issue once, while fixed retail outlets offer target locations for comic book owners to wholesale off their collections.

I'd like to say a few words about **back-issue sensibility**. While it's true that Bronze Age comics continue to surge in popularity, it's still the Silver Age stories that entice many collectors to buy comic book products. We are finding that Silver Age reprints, predominantly Marvel, are on fire.

Golden Age sales: Black Terror #1 VG (minor restoration) $425, Comic Cavalcade #3 GD $150, Spy Fighters 1 VG $45, Weird Science-Fantasy #25(signed by Bradbury) FN+ $150, Wonder Woman #31 GD/VG $95

Silver Age sales: Amazing Spiderman #6 FA/GD $70, #129 VF- $90; Fantastic Four #15 FN- $80, #18 FN+ $100; Hulk #1 App FN (restored) $975,#3 GD/VG $135.

JOHN PIRES / VAULT COMIC AUCTION

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auctions@vaultcomics.com

We have been watching the market fairly closely in the past months, in particular the now commonplace **CGC graded books** and feel that we may begin to see some changes sometime in the near future. Back in the very early 1990s, when Silver Age was still experiencing a major revival, NM examples of key and non-key issues began (at the time) fetching record prices in terms of multiples of guide. This caused great interest in lesser graded copies, dragging the prices of VFs, FNs and even VGs upwards along with the NMs.

Very few collectors stood back and applied the formula of 'scarcity in high grade' on general availability of the same issue in all grades. Example: Fantastic Four #48. An accurately graded NM (or better) copy of this mid-1960s key is not terribly hard to find, but its current price levels can at least be justified. But does this really mean that a VF+ or even VF/NM copy is worth 1.5x or 2x the current NM price? I don't believe so. Exactly how many copies in these grades are out there?

It was only approximately three years ago, after dealers began to conclude that books in lower grades had become slow sellers 'even at Guide', that prices and grade ratios were re-adjusted in price guides.

Just because it's slabbed, doesn't mean it's scarce. If in doubt when buying an expensive item, seek advice from someone who has been in the market for a significant period and has experience in the related era/subject.

Our recent **Auction** results:

Golden Age & 1950s: Adventures In 3-D #1 NM (w/glasses) $96; Famous Funnies #1 (1934) (recently discovered in an attic in the UK) FR $1520; Selection of 11 complete Sunday comic papers (1941) featuring Superman, L'il Abner, Tarzan GD /VG+ $65; Sharp Comics #2 VG $72; Spirit section 8/25/40 VF- $35; Superman #95, 97 (one lot) GD/VG- $68; Wonder Woman #2 appFN- $630.

Silver Age sales: 80-page Giant selection #G16-G87 (66 issues) GD/FN- $379; Action Comics #242 VG+ $129; Amazing Spider-Man #10 appFN $40, #28 VF+ $720, #29 VF+ $363; Fantastic Four #48 NM/- $1085; Iron Man & Sub-Mariner #1 NM $88; Journey Into Mystery #112 VF+ $309; Magnus Robot Fighter #3 NM/- $118; Movie Comics - Yellow Submarine (Gold Key) VF+ (w/poster) $209; Sea Devils #1-26 (one lot) GD+/FN+ $212; Showcase #22 GD+ $145; Tales To Astonish #2 FR $66;

Bronze Age sales: Amazing Adventures #1 NM $50, Bionic Woman #1-5 (one lot) FN-/VF- $41, Hulk #180, 181 (one lot) VF/NM- $489, Phantom Stranger #18 NM- $41, Planet Of The Apes #1-29 (magazine) VF-/VF+ $319.

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spectre52@aol.com

We've all been waiting on pins and needles to see how **Overstreet** handles the recent **CGC explosion**. Prices did jump considerably in some genres; take a look at the percentage of increase for the top Golden Age books.

The only gripe I have is that the point spread has not changed, resulting in the lower grades increasing significantly as well.

CGC is still the number one topic on comics right now, but things have certainly calmed down from the fervor of 2000. The next bump in the road will come when CGC releases the long anticipated population report, which will contain a list of all books encapsulated thus far, giving us a glimpse into the **true scarcity**, or non-scarcity of some comics. Most of us know these things exist in huge numbers.

JOSH NATHANSON COMICLINK.COM

4842 GLENWOOD ST.
LITTLE NECK, NY 11362
718-423-6079

When compared to the volatile stock market over the past few years, it might be an understatement to say that the comic book market has performed extremely well. The marketplace is stronger than I've ever seen in the recent past. Collectors that have paid aggressive prices in the recent past are being rewarded as the market continues to rise for those books which are the most scarce and in high demand.

I believe the trend towards rising prices of high-grade comic books will continue, and perhaps even accelerate as supply dwindles and scarcity becomes more evident. Some of my most recent listings have included such pedigrees as Mile High, San Francisco, Hawkeye, Pennsylvania, and Big Apple.

Recent sales: Amazing Spider-Man #33 NM+ CGC 9.6 (off-white pages, stamp on back cover) $1250, #14 NM- CGC 9.2 $3200, #25 NM- CGC 9.2 $650; Batman #6 NM- CGC 9.2 (white pages) $8500; Daredevil #1 VF- CGC 7.5 $750; Fantastic Four #48 NM CGC 9.4 $1700; Hawkman #6 NM CGC 9.4 $395; Marvel Mystery #92 NM- CGC 9.2 cream to off-white pages $4750; Rangers Comics #4 NM- CGC 9.2 (off-white to white pages) $1100; Tales to Astonish #44 NM CGC 9.4 (off-white to white pages) $2100; Weird Fantasy #15 NM Gaines $1175; X-Men #1 NM- CGC 9.2 (off-white pages) $15,000, #10 VF/NM CGC 9.0 $350, #15 NM CGC 9.4 $1150.

RICHARD EVANS BEDROCK CITY COMIC COMPANY

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713-780-0675
bedrock@flash.net

Low to mid grade Silver Age sales are up about 20%. While we are selling high grade very well it has become increasingly hard to restock. With so many jumping into the CGC fray, the speculation on what will grade high has caused a large percentage of Silver Age (particularly Marvel) to be tied up in CGC's grading vaults and then listed on eBay or sold through specific dealers who specialize in this area. Prices are fluctuating quite a bit.

In my area I have a harder time selling **Silver Age** priced at multiples of Guide. On the other hand we do real well with just about anything pre-1965 priced at or near guide. Sales at the conventions have been average but sales through the web-site (BEDROCKCITY.COM) have been brisk and across the board.

Westerns and Dells are okay, Horror is real solid and we can't keep **Wonder Woman** in stock. Fawcetts and Fiction House priced under $50 sell out quickly. We are looking for lower grade big logo Actions and Detectives for want list customers.

Recent Sales: Action #252 FN/VF $1200; Amazing Spiderman #1 (CGC 6.5 FN+) $4500trade; #37 VF $150; Batman Annual #6 VF $95; Comic Cavalcade #1 VG (minor res.) $1800; Dollman #18 FN $160; Fighting Yank #8 GD $55; Incredible Hulk #181 VF $450; Star Spangled #64 GD/VG $50; Star Spangled #65 FR $80; Sugar and Spike 25 issues in GD to VG 120% guide; World's Best #1 GD $1700; X-Men #1 VG $750, #94 VG $130.

RON MURRY

bigroncomics@yahoo.com
eBay sales under: Jackkeefer
559-285-9751
1-888-484-0153

There have been some incredible advances on **true high grade** material prices over the past year. I admit that I was one of the early skeptics on the establishing of a third-party grading service, but I found with the impact that the Internet was having on the comic book collectibles market, what was advertised was not always what one received. A number of these were from dealers that I found not necessarily reputable, but they definitely had a reputation—if you know what I mean. What CGC does is at least put you in the same playing field. If you buy a comic book that is CGC graded VF you are going to get a book that is at least somewhere in the VF range.

I know that when a person wants to buy a book they want to look at it inside and out. Over the course of a few people doing this, the books are being damaged no matter how careful you are I recently purchased a very high grade Marvel collection, consisting of 400 books from 1964 through 1966. The runs of Spider-Man, Fantastic Four, Avengers, Daredevil, Journey Into Mystery were all but complete. I have sent some off to CGC and I am awaiting their return. At least they will not be man-handled by overzealous purchasers.

A few **recent sales**: Action #86 VF $400 (Okajima); All-Top #12 FN $290; Amazing Fantasy #15 VG- $1650; Amazing Spider-Man #1 VG+ $1850, #2 FN+ $950, #100 NM $200, #122 NM $200; Avengers #1 FN $550, #100 NM $125, #4 FN $400; Daredevil #1 FN- $350; Fantastic Four #1 FN $1800, #4 VG $275, #48 NM $1650; Green Lantern #15 VF+ $850 (Okajima); Marvel Mystery #55 VF- $1000 (Okajima), #57 VF+ $1500 (Okajima); Police #41 VF $200; Rulah #19 VF $400 (Okajima); Sensation #35 VF+ $400; Superman #29 VF $1500 (Okajima), #30 VF+ $1500 (Okajima); Wonder Woman #9 FN+ $500 (Okajima); Worlds Finest #19 VF $650; X-Men #1 FN $1700, #6 NM $800.

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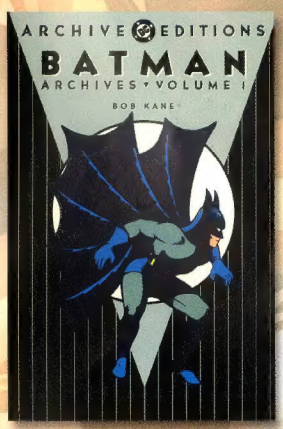

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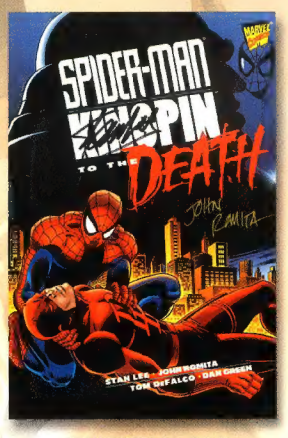

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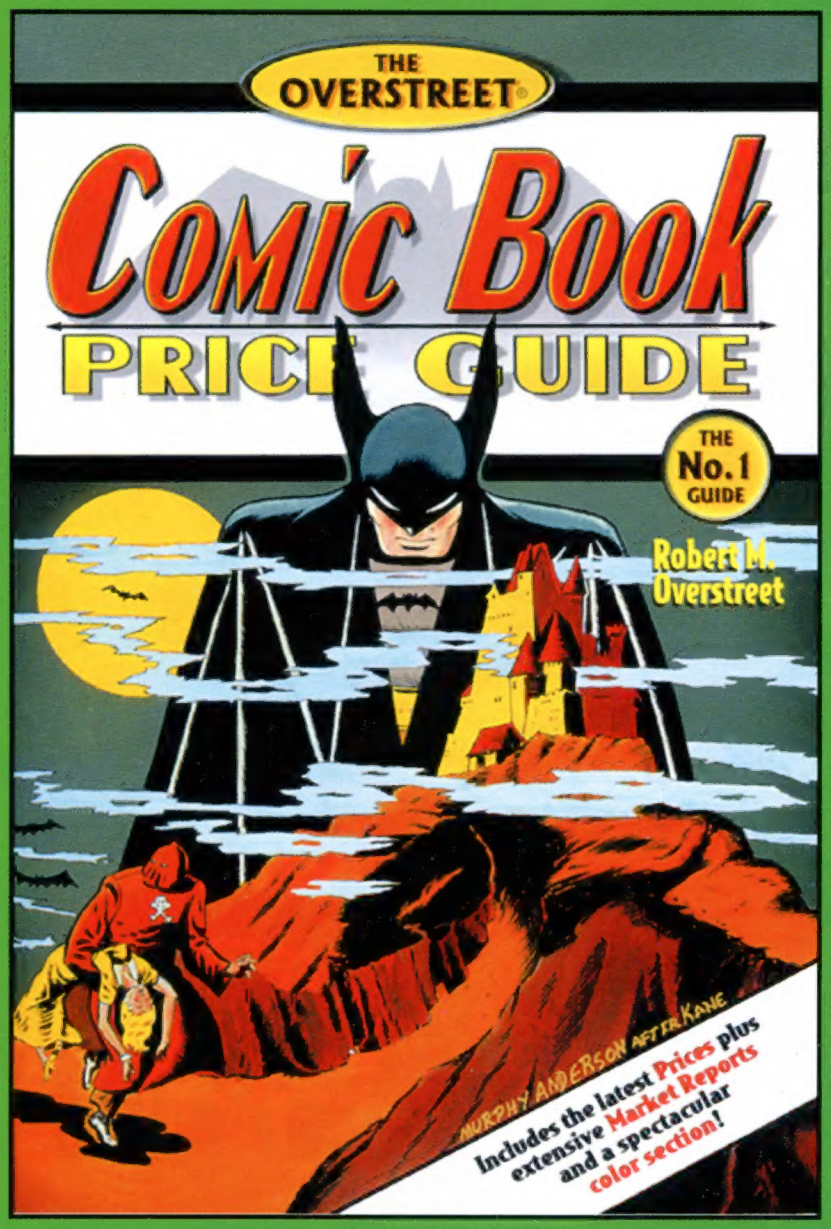
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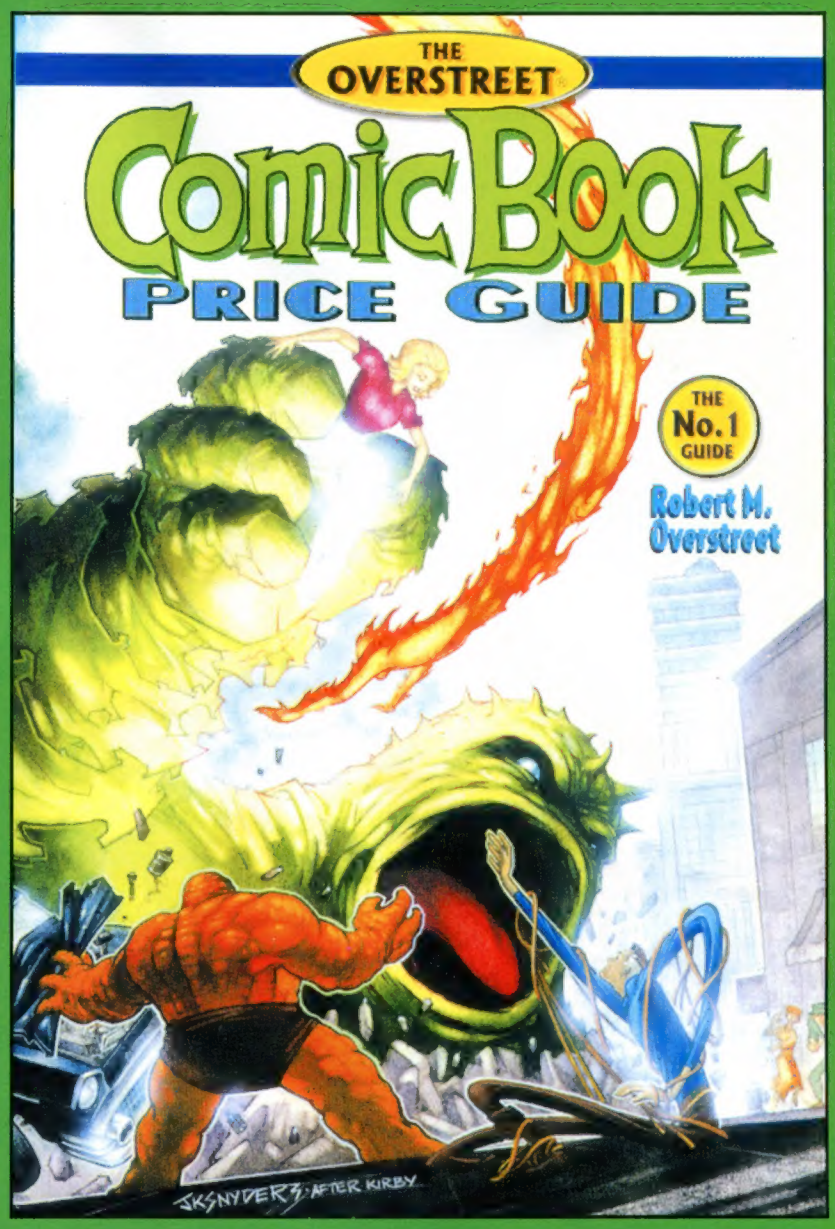

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